LEAVES FROM A SQUATTER'S NOTE-BOOK

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LEAVES FROM A SQUATTER'S NOTE BOOK

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Leaves from a Squatter's Note Book

BY

Thomas Major

LATE INSPECTOR OF RUNS FOR THE N.S.W. GOVERNMENT

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TO THE

AUSTRALIAN SQUATTER OF THE OLD SCHOOL

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED.

"HE WAS A MAN, TAKE HIM FOR ALL IN ALL,
WE SHALL NOT LOOK UPON HIS LIKE AGAIN."

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PREFACE.

WITHOUT the aid of fiction I have endeavoured to portray scenes and events which are vividly pictured in my memory. Often have I been tempted to throw down my pen in disgust, feeling my utter inability to form at its point words conveying even a shadow of the occurrence. Truth being often stranger than fiction, I rely on the *truth*, however inadequately expressed, and with anxiety await the verdict my chapters may receive.*

THE AUTHOR.

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* Unfortunately the Author's death occurred before his work was in the press.

INTRODUCTION.

Australian squatting is sick unto death. For forty years I have followed its fortunes. It is nearly forty years since many of the events happened which I am about to relate. In years I was only a boy when, having arranged with a squatter to acquire colonial experience on his cattle station near Twofold Bay, the steamer *Waratah,* on her way to Melbourne, landed me and my trunk on the beach at Eden, my intention being to wait at Falconer's Hotel until the bullock dray from the station should fetch me. I have, therefore, known squatting in its highest vigour, in its decline, and in its death struggles.

Had I, like Rip Van Winkle, fallen asleep in the early fifties, and remained unconscious until this year of grace 1894, the Australian bush would now appear a *terra incognita* to me, so changed is it in every respect.

In those days the vast plains and open forest, fresh as from the hands of their Creator, were in no way altered by the squatter and his flocks. Not so in the present. The modern squatter and free selector, have, by fencing and ring-barking, destroyed all the former natural beauty; unsightly ramshackle homesteads dot the landscape; the trees, like gaunt spectres, point their dying and dead limbs to heaven, as if calling down vengeance on the sacrilege.

Alas, that it must ever be! Civilization in its march often disfigures both man and nature.

THOMAS MAJOR.

Sydney, 1894.

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CHAPTER I.

THE WRECK OF THE "DUNBAR."

In 1857, after having taken a large mob of cattle overland to Melbourne, I left Twofold Bay. Before resuming bush life, I purposed spending a short holiday in Sydney, and there, shortly after my arrival, it was my fate to witness all the horrors connected with the wreck of the *Dunbar*. More than thirty-five years have passed, but the wreck of that unfortunate vessel is yet vividly before my mind, as if it had occurred only yesterday. On the 20th of August in that year the good ship *Dunbar*, of London, 1,200 tons' burthen, Captain Green in command, with a cargo valued at £72,000, a crew of fifty-nine officers and men, also thirty cabin passengers and thirty-three in the steerage, was fast nearing Sydney, her destined port. So far, the voyage had been safe, fast, and pleasant, and in all human probability would continue so until the anchor was dropped in Sydney Cove. The *Dunbar* had for some years been a favourite ship; colonists visiting England preferred to sail in her, so that her passenger list was always a large one.

I have by me an old copy of the *Sydney Morning*

Herald, the leading article of which paper I will quote respecting the wreck. It runs:

> No sadder event has for a long time past excited the sympathy of the citizens of Sydney than the loss of the *Dunbar*. The destruction of a fine ship and valuable cargo, though not in itself insignificant, is a trifle compared with the loss of more than one hundred lives. Whole families are plunged in mourning; re-unions fondly anticipated and momentarily expected to be realized, have been abruptly hindered, and hindered for ever. Instead of the warm and loving welcome, came tidings of a terrible catastrophe, and then the cold, mutilated, half-unrecognizable forms of those who will never cheer the social circle more. Almost at the threshold of their own homes they perished.
>
> So near once more to their friends and relations, and yet so far. The catastrophe sets at defiance all our ordinary calculations of probability. Wrecks are frequent in flimsy ships, near bad harbors, and with reckless or incompetent commanders. But here was a vessel built as strongly as teak, timber, and honest English shipwrighting could make her, entering one of the finest harbors in the world, commanded by a cautious, vigilant, and experienced sailor, who, both as mate and master, had frequently entered the port before, and knew it well. If we had dared to predict a safe voyage for any vessel, it would have been for the *Dunbar*, under Captain Green. Yet after a successful voyage it has been flung on shore almost in sight of the anchorage, at the very base of the lighthouse, and with the loss of every soul on board but one. So fallible are all the calculations of mortals.
>
> "To-morrow we shall be in Sydney," said the passengers to themselves and to each other as they turned in their berths, pleased to think the perils of the sea were nearly over, and anticipating the greetings of their friends on shore. Alas! no. One frightful crash, one sudden

waking in horror, one bewildering consciousness of the awful fact, one hopeless struggle with the boiling surge, and all their earthly experiences alike of joy and sorrow were closed for ever! It seemed to be tolerably clear Captain Green mistook the gap for the entrance of the Heads, and thought the breakers reported in front to be the waves dashing against the North Head.

On the morning of the 20th of August I went down the harbour to Watson's Bay. This pleasure resort is situated just within the south head, and is separated from the ocean only by a high rocky peninsula a few hundred yards wide. On the ocean side there is a deep indentation in the precipitous sandstone cliff, called the "Gap;" the bottom of this gap, being composed of harder sandstone, still remains. As yet the sea had not washed this rock away, as it has done the softer cliff above it. This bottom is termed the "table rock," and stands a few feet above high water. On a fine day it is dry and level, though deeply indented by fissures made by the ever-rushing sea, which in a storm beats wildly over it to the foot of the cliff, where it expends its fury, angrily dashing its spray higher than the summit of the cliff itself. There, baffled for a time, it returns in foaming streams over the flat rock, again to repeat its certain victory in the cliff's destruction, long deferred though it may be. It was on this table rock, in full view of the people standing on the top of the cliff that the harrowing scenes which I am about to describe were enacted.

I have said that on the 20th of August I was at

Watson's Bay. I intended to return to Sydney in the evening. The day proving wet and stormy, I decided to remain for the night at the Marine Hotel. In that sheltered nook I slept soundly, little dreaming of the tragedy which was taking place not half a mile distant. At daylight I knew that high seas were running outside; their distant boom as they beat upon the cliffs could be distinctly heard, and the spray from them flew as far as the hotel. Shortly after breakfast some one brought the news that a ship had been wrecked at the Gap. I, with most in the hotel, hurried to the top of the cliff, although the wind was blowing a hurricane, while a foaming, broken sea surged beneath us.

At first our attention was drawn to a broken mast with loosely hanging cordage, which, only a few hundred yards distant from us, shot some feet above the water. As the waves rose and fell, we saw that it was held fast in position by something beneath the surface.

Some one cried, "Look, there is a body on the top of a wave!" For a moment it disappeared; the wave had rushed to the cliff on which we stood, there spending its fury. Returning over the table rock, it left the poor body upon it for a few seconds. It was that of a woman, nude, with both legs cut off above the knee. A fresh wave, towering in, lifted it, and we saw it no more. By this time hundreds of people from Sydney had arrived at the cliff. Now every succeeding wave left some memorial of poor humanity, to be gazed at for an instant, and as quickly lost to view.

Mr. George Thornton, then Mayor of Sydney, had now arrived. I will quote his letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald.* Describing the scene, he says:

> At the Gap another brave fellow volunteered to go down to send up some of the mangled corpses now and then lodged on the rocks beneath us, now a trunk of a female from the waist upwards, then the legs of a male, the body of an infant, the right arm, shoulder, and head of a female, the bleached arm and extended hand, with a wash of the receding water, almost as it were in life, beckoning for help; then a leg and thigh, a human head would be hurled along; the sea dashing most furiously as if in angry derision of our efforts to rescue its prey. One figure, a female, nude, and tightly clasping an infant to the breast, both locked in the firm embrace of death, was for a moment seen; then the legs of some trunkless body would leap from the foaming cataract, caused by the returning sea, leaping wildly with feet seen plainly upward in the air to the abyss below, to be again and again tossed up to the gaze of the sorrowing throng above. We provided a rope, lowered the man, with some brave stout hearts holding on to the rope above, and in this manner some portions of the mutilated remains were hauled up to the top of the cliff, until a huge sea suddenly came and nearly smothered those on the cliff, wetting them all to the skin.

All this time no one dreamt that the wrecked vessel was the *Dunbar.* Some surmised it must be the *Vocalist* or *Zemander*, both immigrant vessels and overdue.

One among the crowd—Mr. Daniel Egan, Postmaster-General—stood near me; his wife and step-children were passengers by the *Dunbar*. Some one said a board had been picked up—a portion of a gangway—whereon was a lion rampant, which, I believe, was the *Dunbar* crest. All was, therefore, now known. I saw poor Mr. Egan fall fainting into the arms of a bystander. All that evening the same miserable scenes continued on the table rock.

I was early on the spot, as were many others, on the morning of the 22nd. Some one fancied he could see a man on the rocks. A boy named Antonio Wooller, an Icelander, who was a watchmaker's apprentice, volunteered to be let down; and, sure enough, he found that the man was alive. On being drawn up, he was much exhausted. He was taken to the Marine Hotel, where he fell fast asleep. On awaking, somewhat refreshed, he made the following statement:

> My name is James Johnston, aged twenty-three, and an A.B. on board the *Dunbar*. I have never been to this port before. All I can tell with regard to the wreck is, that the ship was off Botany Heads about half-past seven or eight in the evening, the wind blowing directly on the land, and I think that prevented the captain standing out to sea. We, however, saw the lighthouse all along the coast. The first and second mate and three seamen were all looking out for the land, by the captain's orders. It was the second mate first cried, "Breakers ahead!" All hands were then on deck, and instantly they tried to get the vessel round; but they found she was in the midst of the breakers, and all their efforts were to no purpose.
>
> I think the passengers were all below. After the vessel

struck, several of the cabin passengers attempted to get on deck, but the water knocked them down as they made the effort, and they must have been all smothered or drowned in the cabin. I and two others who clung to the side of the vessel were the last that I think survived, as I recollect holding on when the part I held separated from the rest of the vessel, and how I was thrown on the rocks I do not know. The vessel was a full hour breaking up.

The *Black Swan* steamer, having the superintendent of police, Captain McLerie, on board, called at Watson's Bay. She had been skirting the shores of the harbour in order to pick up any floating bodies, or any that might be stranded on the beach. I went on board, and remained with her till she returned to Sydney in the evening. At Watson's Bay two coffins, filled with the mutilated fragments recovered by the man lowered from the cliff, were placed on board. When the steamer continued her search, several corpses, much disfigured, already lay on the deck. We steamed across the harbour's mouth to the quarantine station, taking on board several more, and then on to Manly, where, I think, three others lay on the beach. On the way back to Sydney, the floating remains of a girl just approaching womanhood were recovered. Some friends of the unfortunate passengers who were with us to identify the dead, felt certain they recognized the girl's body, but for some reason she was buried as unclaimed. Not many floated inside the harbour, most bodies being either broken to pieces on the rocks at the Gap, or else devoured by the sharks which swarm in these parts.

So far as I remember, out of a total of one hundred and twenty-two on board, only twenty-nine bodies in a tolerably recognizable state were recovered; one of these, perfect in all parts, but without a head, was heir to some property, and the fact that his identity could not be fully established was the cause of litigation in after years.

I attended the inquest. The scene was most distressing. One juror fainted, and was carried out. The little dead-house near the Mariners' Church was quite filled, and had the appearance of a shambles.

The procession at the burial of the remains was most impressive as the long line of hearses wended its way along George Street, attended by cabs and omnibuses innumerable, the melancholy strains of a band playing the Dead March in *Saul*, adding to the solemnity.

For many weeks after the wreck, the Gap and harbour beaches were strewn with portions of broken pianos, candles, clothing, music, and a thousand other things. I picked up a piece of crochet-work, with needle and thread still adhering.

So ends the sad story of the wreck of the *Dunbar*.

Since that day a new generation of Australians has been ushered into being. Their ignorance and carelessness with regard to landmarks or events in their colony's history, often grieves and surprises me. To many the very occurrence of the wreck is unknown, and, if it be, the locality is variously stated as being somewhere between the Heads and Botany.

Very often I have stood on the deck of a coasting steamer, and pointed out the precise spot. Generally my information has been flatly contradicted (although I stated I was present at the time) by some young sprig, wise in his own conceit, and of questionable manners. Only the other day, a bank inspector informed me that the man Johnston was a humbug, and had never been on board the *Dunbar* at all !

CHAPTER II.

MOONLIGHTING AND GULLY-RAKING.

I HAD now to resort to what is termed moonlighting and gully-raking, as breakneck and hazardous an undertaking as can well be imagined, and one that should be attempted by none but those who can ride anything in the shape of horse-flesh, jump a fallen tree, rock, or creek, and dive under low-limbed timber, risking life and limb every moment, and all by the light of the moon. The uncertainty of the shadows thrown by this light when in hot haste to head an unruly scrubber, none but those who have tried it can realize. Not a moment to deliberate—a dark object in front of you—and at it you go! It may be a tangible, legitimate jump over a fallen tree, or only the black charcoal line left where the tree has lately been consumed by fire. All the same, you must be ready with a firm hand and seat to take what comes. So much for the dangers beneath you. Equally great are those above you. A glimmer of moonlight comes through the trees. Again you see a dark object right in front. A moment's speculation: will you be able to clear it by throwing yourself forward on your horse's neck? Down you go! Perhaps you have just escaped by a hair's-breadth some overhanging limb, sufficiently strong to have broken every bone in your body had you come in contact with it. As you dash underneath, you feel the rough bark as it grates along your back. Perhaps after all the danger is only imaginary, for the object may have been only a yielding leafy vine. So much for a few—a very few—of the dangers of moonlighting.

I knew that a large number of wild cattle were to be found in the scrubby ranges, and could only be yarded by gully-raking. The stockman, myself, and four others started for the locality, taking sufficient provisions for supper and breakfast. The weather being warm, we did not require rugs or blankets. At sundown we arrived at our camping-ground. In a well-grassed gully we hobbled our horses, making our fire behind an immense granite boulder, boiled our quart pots, had supper, and afterwards, the usual pipe and yarn. One story told by the poor stockman—the narrative of his sister's death—I well remember.

I had frequently noticed that the sight of an opossum made him frantic, and that he would kill it if possible, using strong language as well.

We had stretched ourselves on some soft grass, placing our saddles under our heads for pillows, the stockman being next to me, and the moon shining brightly. Suddenly he jumped to his feet, and, pointing to a branch overhead, drew my attention to an opossum, easily to be seen, as it was directly between us and the moon.

"I must have a shy at that infernal beast," he cried, letting fly a piece of stick as he spoke.

This had no further effect than to send it to the next branch. This was enough for him, as it was soon out of sight. When again lying down, I asked him why the sight of an opossum had such an effect on him.

"I will tell you, sir," he replied. "My father was a stockman on the Murrumbidgee. My mother had long been dead. I had a sister four years older than myself. I was then eight. We lived with father at a far back station, only our three selves. My sister and I were left at the hut when father was at the head station. Sometimes he would be away ten or twelve days. On these occasions my sister and I amused ourselves hunting opossums. One day she went alone, and when night came on had not returned. It was her twelfth birthday. Before leaving, she had made some doughboys, which she told me to boil with a bit of salt beef for dinner. They had long been cooked, and I had done my best to keep them hot. It was now dark, and *no sister!* I had coo-eed in every direction until my voice failed me. Hungry and tired, I fell asleep. Old Rip, father's dog, had followed my sister, so I had not his company. At daylight I awoke, for a moment forgetting all that had passed. I thought I heard my sister's voice in her bed-room. Springing up, I rushed in, but she was not there; her little bed remained as she left it yesterday, her dolly on the opossum rug covering. I threw myself on the bed and, taking dolly in my arms, spoke to it as if it had life.

"'Oh, how hungry must poor sister be!' I said. 'No supper—no breakfast! Oh, what will father say?'

"Something whispered to me, 'Go to him,' and running to the kitchen, I placed two of the doughboys in an old handkerchief, leaving two for sister in case she should return while I was away.

"Father had told me the head station was twenty miles distant, and that a bridle-track led to it, but I had never been there. The sun had just risen when off I started at a run, crying as if my heart would break. I found the track where it entered a scrub on the other side of the plain, and followed it as best I could for a long way. My feet were bleeding, for I had no shoes on. Being very hungry, I commenced eating a doughboy as I ran. The sun was high and the heat great. My mouth was so dry that I could hardly swallow the hard cold paste, but it was well watered by my tears. I had just arrived at a small water-hole, muddy and dirty, but what of that? Throwing myself down by it, my lips were soon refreshed.

"The crack of a stock-whip caused me to look up. Oh! with what delight I saw father and two black boys driving a mob of cattle. My father had me in his arms in a moment. As quickly as I could I informed him what had happened. He directed one of the black boys to return to the head station and summon all hands from there, leaving me with the other to be taken up on the saddle before him, and as quickly as possible follow to our home. Then father galloped off. Of course, he arrived there long before me and the black boys. The hut remained as I had left it in the morning. The sun was now near setting. The black boy who had brought me home baked a damper, left it in the ashes, telling me to look after it, and mounted his horse to look for sister's tracks. I was now alone. I soon fell fast asleep, forgetting all about the damper in the ashes. How long I slept I know not, but I was awakened by the sound of men's voices. The boss and all hands had arrived from the head station to assist in the search. Nothing could be done until daylight, which was now breaking. About midday, father and all returned, bringing with them poor sister's body. The black boys had found her tracks and followed them for several miles. Hearing a dog bark, they found old Rip at the foot of a dead iron-bark tree, and there, about four feet from the ground, hung poor sister, one of her arms firmly fixed in an old hole, where a black had formerly cut out an opossum. A glance showed how it had happened. She had placed a forked sapling slantwise against the iron-bark tree. By this means she was enabled to reach the hole, and, putting her arm in for opossums, I suppose, the sapling had slipped, and her arm had broken between the elbow and wrist. The bone, coming through the skin, had caught in the hole. As the sapling had fallen, she had no support for her feet, and there, with no one to help, she had hung in agony until she died. Death had not come quickly, for when they found her she was barely cold. O God ! When I think of her sufferings I am mad. The sight of an opossum brings all back to. my mind. You are the only one to whom I have mentioned her fate."

The stockman, having finished, got up and placed some wood on the fire, seated himself on a log, and lighted his pipe. With his head between his hands he sat motionless. I could see from where I was lying the glow of the pipe ; otherwise I should have thought him asleep.

Having a look at my watch, I found it after twelve. I gave him a nudge, reminded him of the coming morning's work, and advised him to lie down and go to sleep. With a start, he looked up, and said : " Do you know, sir, I don't think it will be long before I see my sister again. I have had that feeling lately. After my telling you all about her death, it makes me feel bad. Some day I know my brains will be knocked out. When that day comes, my death will be sudden, and not like my poor sister's."

A piece of stick in the fire caused a momentary blaze, which lighted up his face, and showed me he had been crying.

" Put such nonsense out of your mind," I said to him. " You are too good a horseman to be killed in that manner. You could steer your horse safely through a hollow log."

"My word!" he replied, with a smile, "I believe I could." So then we both lay down.

The first glimmer of daybreak was just appearing in the east when I awoke. Rousing all hands, our quart pots were soon on the fire, and prepared for breakfast; our horses were saddled and our pipes were lighted. The stockman had just pulled some hair from his horse's tail, and, plaiting it for a whip cracker, he said to me in a whisper:

"My sister appeared to me last night. My time is short."

I must here mention that at this early date most stock saddles had not spring bars for the stirrup leathers; in fact, the old stockmen would not use them, being so wedded to the staple and roller, and preferring it to what they termed the "new-fangled fixing," which might do, they said, for plain level country, but for moonlighting or gully raking "give them a stirrup that would not fly out at every bit of a hill you climbed." This was also the stockman's opinion, a fatal one for him, as that day proved.

Fully twenty miles of as rough country as could be imagined was now before us, following the course of the river to the head station, with deep gullies and steep spurs of ranges, and between these spurs small open flats, the former being densely timbered. Our object now being to keep the cattle we should find on these flats, which had left the thickly-timbered heights during the night to feed before returning to them—this they generally do at sunrise—I arranged that I and an assistant should take the right bank of the river, keeping well back on the spurs, the stockman and his assistant doing the same on the left bank, one man keeping along the river in the rear, the other in readiness to go ahead and check a rush.

We had not proceeded far before the first mob was sighted, quietly feeding in the bed and along the bank of the river, now a mere chain of waterholes, with rich grass between them. Several scrubbing bulls were with them, one big black one having horns and a hump like a buffalo. This brute we had often seen—we had named him "Satan"—but had vainly endeavoured to yard him. The stockman, catching sight of him, exclaimed:

"I will yard that devil before night, if I die for it."

Satan just then lifted his head, caught sight of us, and made for the nearest scrub. The stockman was too quick for him. He headed and turned him, and with many a stinging cut from his whip ran him back into the mob, which was closely following at his heels, doing its utmost to break away in all directions. After much trouble, we finally steadied the lot. Finding many clean skins among them, and a larger haul than I expected, I decided not to risk them, and, if possible, to yard them at the head station, running in any stray mobs we might find on our way there. Well we knew the difficulty of the proceeding in such broken country.

We had not gone far before Satan made a headlong bolt for a brigalow scrub we were passing.

After him went the stockman. I called to him to let the brute go. He either did not hear me, or his blood was up, remembering perhaps his recent boast, "to yard the brute, or die in the attempt." In a moment both were out of sight, the thick timber and undergrowth hiding them effectually.

I and the assistants managed with great difficulty to yard the mob. At the yard we waited patiently, expecting the stockman to make his appearance. A wild yell from the blacks' camp now reached our ears, and a black boy came running in all haste towards us, shouting, "Yarraman [the blacks' name for horse] killim white fellow." All we could gather from him was that the blacks had seen a horse galloping towards the horse paddock dragging a man after him. Off we all rushed. On arriving at the paddock slip-rails, a shocking sight met our view. The horse, all covered with foam, stood panting, and, hanging fast in the stirrup-iron by one foot, was all that remained of the poor stockman—little else than a shapeless mass of clothes, bones, and flesh. How far he had been dragged we could not then tell. Next day, the blacks tracked the horse, and found that the accident had occurred shortly after we had lost sight of him, when in pursuit of Satan. The horse had slipped on a smooth granite rock, almost level with the surface of the ground, slippery as ice, and covered with soft green moss, one of the most dangerous traps a stockman's horse can meet. Mournfully we proceeded home with the poor fellow's remains, and next day they were deposited in the little station burying-ground I had formed in a secluded bend of the river. And there he rests.

He was not the only one I had laid there. A few months previously a young friend had met his death in an equally shocking manner. I planted weeping willows near. No clergyman performed the ceremony of consecration. The sleepers sleep none the less soundly, and to me at least the ground is none the less hallowed. What a new proprietor or free selector may have done during the thirty-six years that have passed since that day, I know not. The willow-trees, if still standing, are doubtless giants, dipping their graceful foliage in the river But of the sleepers near, none have any knowledge. The fence and wooden slab I placed around and over them have either crumbled to dust like those beneath, or the all-consuming bush fire has swept away every trace of them.

CHAPTER III.

A RAID ON THE WARRAGALS.

THE unstocked and almost unknown country to the far west had been, for the first time in my experience, visited by drought. A year had passed, during which time little or no rain had fallen. Day after day, month after month, the sun rose and set, having the appearance of a lurid fiery ball. From the interminable treeless plains all verdure had departed. As the last drops of moisture were wrung from the earth by the scorching heat, there arose a quivering misty haze, like that which rises from glowing metal, causing the eye to dim and the head to ache.

With the exception of the ever-present fly and ant, all life had departed. The water, or anything at all like water, had long disappeared from the clay pans, the only receptacles for it in these riverless regions. Most of the pans had now a strange appearance, caused by the drying of the liquid mud. They seemed to be fined with a tesselated pavement of broken potsherds, most of them being marked with the impress of some wild animal's footsteps while in search of water, the mud while soft retaining the impression like wax. Other larger and more retentive pans had evaporated slowly. The water, receding to the deeper centre, had attracted innumerable frogs and tadpoles, becoming at length a very witches' cauldron, of green glue-like consistency, caused by their dead and dying bodies. This hell's broth had attracted many of the Australian fauna. In their vain endeavour to reach it they had perished miserably; the slimy, sticky mud around the pool had been more than their strength could surmount, and their gaunt skeleton forms, covered with a parchment skin, had remained there in the position in which their last dying throes of agony had left them.

In a pandemonium such as I have described, human or animal life could not exist; in short, desolation reigned supreme. These arid regions were like the abomination of desolation spoken of in Scripture. In short, no pen can describe or give even a faint idea of them to those who have not witnessed such scenes in all their horror.

My station, being situated further east, had been blessed with a few thunder-storms, and had therefore grass and water. These essentials had attracted game of all kinds from the waterless waste. This mattered little, as my country was not half-stocked; but after the game also arrived a tribe of wild blacks. The tame blacks residing on the station termed these new arrivals "Warragals" ("wild"), and informed me they would spear cattle, steal sheep, or kill a white man, if a chance offered. Some broken ranges skirted by dense brigalow scrub, formed the locality selected by these worthies for their encampment. For some time, so far as I was aware, they had caused me no injury; they never came near the head station, their presence in the ranges being only made evident by the smoke from their fires. I had placed a flock of sheep at a small lagoon a few miles distant from where the Warragals were supposed to be encamped; the sheep were in charge of a shepherd and a hut-keeper. One morning, the latter made his appearance at the head station with the intelligence that neither sheep nor shepherd had returned home the night before. He also said they had been visited a few days previously by some strange blacks, who had demanded flour and tobacco, which was not given them. They then became very angry, and the ringleader, placing his spear in his woomera (throwing stick), was about to cast it at the shepherd, who presented an old horse pistol at him, whereupon they all decamped.

At daybreak I and a young friend, who was learning colonial experience — afterwards termed "Jackarooing"—armed ourselves, I with a revolver, he with a rifle, and rode off in the direction in which the shepherd usually fed his sheep. Soon we came upon the track of sheep, numbering perhaps a hundred, and heading towards the ranges. Following them up for several miles, I at length saw the impression of a bare foot over the track of the sheep. I also found some white ash which had fallen from a fire stick. These indications were enough to convince me that the disappearance of the sheep and shepherd had been caused by the blacks. Keeping a sharp look-out, we entered a gorge having high granite rocks on either side. After going a short distance, we found the remains of a fire and the bones of a half-roasted sheep. Here the thieves had feasted. Proceeding further, we discovered several sheep still alive, all having had their front legs broken, a favourite mode resorted to by black sheep-stealers, who had thus fresh mutton for several days without the trouble of shepherding.

I got off my horse, and cut the throats of the unfortunate animals. My friend, who was a short distance behind me, shouted, "Look out!" I was then in the act of despatching the last sheep. A spear whizzed past my head, and caused me to look up. Standing boldly in relief on a projecting ledge of rock stood a naked black fellow. Placing a fresh spear in his woomera, he was in the act of launching it at me, when at the same moment the sharp crack of my friend's rifle echoed through the gorge.

The savage tumbled down headlong to a ledge of rock twenty feet below where he had stood. His death-struggles causing him to roll off, a further fall of sixty or seventy feet brought him on a level with the spot where I stood. He gave one or two gasps and died. High above us from the rocks came savage yells, and from unseen hands several spears and waddies were thrown, happily without effect. The locality having now become too hot, we retraced our steps.

During the next few days, I recovered most of the sheep, but could find no trace of the shepherd. Fortunately, Lieutenant W—— and his black troopers were in the neighbourhood. It was not many days before he came to my assistance. Rain had fallen, but W——'s troopers had little difficulty in picking up the old sheep tracks. They also discovered the body of the lost shepherd, now in a fearful state of decomposition. It had been thrown into a hole made by a burnt tree, the skull having been fractured by a nullah or waddie. The murderers had placed sticks and grass over it, effectually hiding it from all eyes but those of an aboriginal. No doubt now remained of the Warragals being the culprits; W—— therefore determined to disperse the horde.

We proceeded to the gorge where the black had been shot. The body still lay where we had left it, but was much torn by dogs. We continued following up the gorge until it became so narrow and broken that it was impossible to take on the horses. W——, being now in command, and leader of the intended raid, ordered the troopers to dismount, while he and I did the same; the horses were left in charge of a trooper with strict orders to use his carbine should he be molested by wild blacks. Our party now consisted of W——, myself, six troopers, and a young Murray black named "Ned." A particularly clever tracker was ordered to take the lead. Through almost impenetrable scrub he led us to the top of the gorge.

On arriving there, Ned pointed to the ground, saying, "My word! Black fellow close up. Me see him track all about." Nothing, so far as we could see, was visible. W——, being content with the knowledge of Ned's superior eyesight, only replied, "You look out, budgeree." We were now overlooking a belt of scrub, to all appearance impenetrable. Ned, pointing to a part more open than the rest, exclaimed, "Me think it, blacks' camp sit down there." Below where we stood, the sound of chopping was heard. Ned whispered to W——, "My word, me catch him that fellow. You see!" Then, taking off every stitch of clothing, he fastened his belt containing ammunition round his waist, and taking his carbine he quickly slipped out of sight.

He had been gone about twenty minutes, when, to our astonishment, he returned, having with him a young black gin (woman), clothed, like himself, in sunshine. The poor creature appeared in a terrible fright. We could not at present let her escape, as she would have regained the encampment, and warned her companions of our approach. As no injury was offered to her, by degrees she became more assured, doubtless imagining at first that she was to be killed forthwith. Her language was quite unintelligible to any of us, we being certainly the first white men she had ever seen. By signs we managed to convey to her our wish to visit the camp, and to have her lead us there. But, considering the day was too far advanced to do this, as all the able-bodied men would be away hunting, we determined to return where we had left the horses, and camp again for the night.

What to do to prevent the gin escaping was now a puzzle. Her being unclothed and as slippery as an eel made it no easy matter. Taking off his belt, W—— fastened it with a pair of handcuffs round her body. Attaching to this a horse-halter rope, he and I held it by turns, and so managed the unpleasant business. At supper, she would not eat our food, but fortunately a trooper had killed an opossum, which was roasted for her. This she ate.

A long weary night at last came to an end. The first glimmer of day saw us, accompanied by our prisoner, at the top of the gorge. We could now easily distinguish the smoke rising above the blacks' encampment. To arrive there before the blacks left for the day's hunting or fresh depredations was now our object. The gin, of course, ignorant of our intentions, led the way, W—— holding the rope fixed to her belt. At length we arrived quite close to the camp. W—— now delivered our sable prisoner into my charge. The troopers, divesting themselves of their clothes, all but their caps and belts, quietly stole round the encampment. Having now much trouble in keeping my prisoner from giving the alarm to her people, I could only silence her by dumb pantomime of throat-cutting, and so forth, which succeeded admirably.

The signal arranged by W——, when the troopers should reach the camp, was the firing of his pistol. Before this he had given strict orders that no black fellow was to be shot unless with his permission, and any trooper who should think of firing on a woman or child well knew that a ball from W——'s revolver would be his fate for such an act of disobedience. I had unbuckled the belt around the waist of my prisoner on hearing W——'s signal. She was now free, and bolted at once towards the camp, which was a large one, numbering fully one hundred and fifty men, women, and children, all told.

None but those who have been in a similar situation can imagine the scene that followed, for the wild shouts of men, women, and children, the yelping of mangy cur dogs, and the general excitement, were deafening. A black, seizing a waddie, flung it at W——, but it fortunately missed him. W——, in return, raised his revolver and shot him dead. This was the only blood shed, and all were allowed to make their escape, leaving behind them their weapons, which were all collected by the troopers and burnt. In one of the gunyas we found the sheath-knife and quart pot belonging to the murdered shepherd. This made us certain that we had dealt with the real murderers, and given them their deserts.[1]

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[1] I am well aware that much has been said and written with regard to the unnecessary cruelty, if not the wanton butchery, to which the aborigines have been subjected by that useful body, the black police. That there are and have been black police officers *and* black police officers, I also know; but my experience has taught me to take all sensational narratives with much salt. What I have written is true in every particular. Would it were the same with all that has been said on this subject!—T. M.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EXPLORING TRIP IN THE SIXTIES.

THE earlier sixties witnessed an exodus of squatters from the southern colonies in quest of fresh fields and pastures new. North of latitude 20°, Queensland was little known at that early time, and that little only from the vague description given by Leichhardt and a few explorers, who, by following the course of the Burdekin and other rivers, had given names to these, and to the most prominent landmarks, hills, and ranges on and within sight of their banks.

As to the nature and extent of the pastoral country, they had said barely anything on which reliance could be placed; neither, indeed, with but few exceptions, were they competent to form an opinion. They had described the aborigines with whom they had come in contact as a fine athletic race, in the enjoyment of abundance of fish and game, and with cannibalistic proclivities less than doubtful.

To this almost unknown land now flocked, in parties numbering three or four, many adventurous young men, with the intention, should they find the soil and grasses suitable, of farming cattle and sheep stations themselves, or, after discovering a favourite locality, of selling the position and knowledge of it to some wealthy squatter or moneyed Sydney firm, who would be willing to purchase for a few hundred pounds and a small fee to Government the right, established by custom, of applying for a lease of an almost unlimited number of acres in this hitherto unknown country.

Myself, a young friend, and a civilized New South Wales black fellow named Jerry, formed one of these parties. Providing ourselves with horses, firearms, provisions, etc., we set sail from Sydney in a small vessel. After a long passage, we arrived at Port Denison. Bowen, then consisting of several huts, a pub., and a few milch cows, brought overland and owned by a man rejoicing in the soubriquet (which his personal appearance had obtained him) of "Tommy Roundhead," the only name by which he was known. Tommy and the owner of the pub. drove a roaring business, the former supplying the milk, the latter the rum, the two liquids in conjunction forming, if not nectar, something very nearly akin to it. A few days' spell for our horses being necessary to reduce the swelling in their limbs caused by the long sea voyage, my friend and I were enabled to form an unprejudiced and just opinion of this beverage. Whether it was something in the climate, or the excellence of the ingredients, I do not know, but to this day I am conscious of a longing—never, I fear, to be gratified—to sip a pint pot of that delectable fluid, seated on the rail in Tommy's stockyard.

Horses and men being thoroughly refreshed, one fine morning we plunged into the unknown wilderness, following the coast as nearly as possible. The luxurious tropical vegetation is only to be witnessed in all its beauty before the advent of the white man with his flocks and herds has destroyed the innumerable climbing creepers and vines, some of which bear the most beautiful flowers, and others fruit. The flavour and taste of the fruit I have never forgotten. Once I plucked from a branch a small lemon, lovely and ripe, as it appeared to me, in size about that of a goose's egg. The outside had the most vivid colouring of red and yellow stripes. One bite was sufficient against further temptation—in short, the taste was abominable. It was then that I made the discovery, that though the eye may be feasted in these coast jungles, all, or nearly all, the fruit which is so beautiful in appearance is vile to the last degree.

With much trouble we succeeded in crossing several small creeks alive with alligators. These brutes could be seen basking on the mud-banks. On seeing us, they generally plunged into the water.

On the second day, we had arrived at the embouchure of a large river, which we afterwards found to be the Burdekin, which could be crossed at that part only by a long swim. For this experiment we had no inclination, as the alligators were there in dozens. On a high bank overlooking the river we encamped for the night. We had no sleep, however, for the mosquitos took good care to make that an impossibility.

Next morning, following up the river, we came to a part which we thought we could negotiate without much danger, a small island being in the centre of the channel. To gain this, Jerry plunged in. He and his horse reached it without much difficulty, my friend and I following him. The island was covered with a growth of mangroves, in which mosquitos were literally in swarms; they were of all sizes, from the little black pest (which it is almost an impossibility to kill—should you be successful, he is so small that you are ashamed of the trouble you have taken) to the large grey fellow, half an inch in length, to quash which is a perfect pleasure, for you feel you have something for your pains in bulk if not in venom. We had not been long on the island before we discovered that the mangroves were infested by green whip snakes. To beat a retreat as quickly as possible, we set about crossing the second channel without more delay. This was easier said than done. Jerry, being again the leader, found it much deeper, in fact almost a swim. However, he managed to cross in safety, and so did my friend.

I had also got half-way over when, to my horror, about fifty yards up the stream, coming round the point of the island, I saw a huge alligator swimming directly towards me. I had often heard of fright causing the hair to stand upright. If at that moment mine did not really bristle, my head had that feeling, for an indescribable creeping sensation spread over the scalp, as if every hair had life.

I had drawn my legs up on my horse's withers. He was now snorting and plunging, and had nearly unseated me. Had he done so, I fear I should not now be relating this incident. The alligator, whether frightened by the struggles of my horse, or not liking my appearance, passed me on one side. I shall never forget my feelings as I beheld his little pig-like eyes winking at me as he swam by. All this happened in much less time than I have taken to write it. On the bank, white as a sheet, stood my friend, while poor Jerry, whose colour was as black as ever, had tears in his eyes. However, all's well that ends well.

In a short time we caught glimpses of Mount Elliot, some miles distant, and directed our course towards it, intending to camp at its foot that evening, and next morning make the ascent to the top, in order to obtain a good view of the surrounding country. Unmistakable evidence that large numbers of blacks were now in our vicinity made it imperative on us to keep a sharp look-out. The sun was setting when the base of Mount Elliot was reached. There we camped on an open plain. This was safer, for there was no cover for blacks to lie in ambush. By turns we kept watch during the night, extinguishing our fire and having supper before darkness set in.

Long before sunrise our horses were saddled, and we were on our way to the summit. This we reached just as the sun rose from the ocean. What a lovely prospect was now open to our view! Away eastward lay the coast, easily to be traced north and south for many miles. As the slight swell broke on the sandy beach, it seemed a line of dazzling brightness; the sea was still as a mill-pond, with not a sail in sight. All was as motionless as a painting; no sound was to be heard but the chir-chirring of many locusts. The solitude was most depressing, and, like Alexander Selkirk, I could feel that solitude was charmless. To the west, as far as the eye could reach, was an open park-like country, which seemed to end in some blue, hazy ranges many miles inland.

Far to the north-west Jerry's piercing eye could distinguish (or he fancied it could) the smoke of fires. If it were so, we well knew it could be nought else but a blacks' encampment, no white man having as yet made these regions his home. The smoke being in the direction in which we intended travelling, most probably we should come in contact with them. We descended the mountain, and proceeded on our way towards it. By midday the heat became almost unbearable, and the mosquitos were dreadful. No stock of any kind had hitherto depastured on the rich flats over which we were now travelling. Kangaroo grass, high as our horses' heads, gave shelter to the stinging pests which arose from it in clouds. We and our horses were covered by them, and we were tormented beyond endurance.

Heavy thunder-clouds were now massing in the east, giving notice of a coming storm. Having now arrived at a large, wide, and apparently deep creek, and evening drawing nigh, we determined to camp. Bright lightning-flashes, accompanied by heavy peals of thunder, gave warning that a tropical tempest was near at hand. Although still more than an hour before sundown, it was almost dark. The enormous black clouds, rolling over and over each other, made it certain that a strong wind-current was raging high overhead, but not a breath disturbed the thick, sulphurous atmosphere around us; so oppressive had it become that we could hardly breathe. On a slight rise we pitched our tent, lighting our fire behind the butt of an enormous uprooted gum-tree which lay a few yards from the water. We had hobbled our horses on a patch of burnt feed some distance away. Poor brutes! The mosquitos and sandflies had driven them nearly frantic. For some time there had been a cessation of loud and continuous thunder-peals, but as the sun set, all around became darker and darker, until the darkness, like that of Egypt, could almost be felt.

On such a night we thought it unnecessary to keep our usual watch in case of an attack, never for a moment imagining that any human being, civilized or savage, would leave any shelter he might have. As yet no rain had fallen, but louder and louder became the thunder, until it sounded in one continuous roar. A few heavy drops now fell, causing us to seek the tent's shelter. There the heat was, if possible, worse, making it absolutely imperative, in order to exist at all, to divest ourselves of most of our clothing, with the exception of our Crimean shirts. At the entrance of the tent, Jerry had collected and lighted a small heap of green leaves, in order to make a fire that would create, as he said, "A caboon (large) smoke," which would roast the mosquitos. A few may thus have been deterred from entering the tent, but the myriads that placed the fumigation at defiance made their absence imperceptible.

A terrific flash lighted all around for a moment; a sullen roar, far distant as yet, could be heard approaching; the tops of the palm and pandanus-trees now began to wave their long, glittering, sword-like foliage as they felt the first breath of air, giving out sounds not unlike the clashing of real weapons as they rattled and rubbed against each other. Soon the tempest was upon us in all its fury; peal after peal became louder as the wind freshened to a complete hurricane; lightning-flashes darted incessantly in every direction, the palms bending their heads almost to the ground; the more sturdy pandanus stood erect, parting by hundreds with their dry, sharp-pointed swords as they were wrenched from the stem and hurled into the air. Then came the rain. Heavens! How it did rain that night! First came big steaming drops, which, as each lightning-flash shone upon them, had the appearance of endless ropes of liquid silver. Then, as they became united, they were transformed into a torrent like a second deluge. As we lay in our soaked and streaming tent, Jerry whispered to me:

"Massa, me hear Warragal black fellow."

"Gammon!" I replied.

"Bail gammon" (not gammon), was his rejoinder.

"Well, if you think so, and your carbine is not too wet, fire it off; that will frighten them," said I.

For a period of full twenty minutes there had been no lightning. All was dark as Erebus, when Jerry, pointing his carbine from the tent entrance, fired. The report had barely ceased when yell after yell met our astonished ears, as if the darkness were inhabited by a legion of devils. Accompanying this, came a thud, thud, like the sound of falling spears striking the ground all around the tent; one of them pierced it, and narrowly missed pinning me to the earth. The intense darkness had made our intending murderers uncertain in their aim. Should a fresh flash again light up our white tent while we were still in it, our fate would be pretty certain. From the slanting position of the spear that had entered the tent, and the near proximity of the creek in our front, we judged our foes were to our rear. In an instant the same thought occurred to us all. "The big tree," we whispered simultaneously, and, knowing its position to be only a few steps distant from the entrance of the tent, all three of us gained this, our only chance of refuge, in a few seconds. We were now in the unenviable position of being "between the devil and the deep sea," the last few minutes being sufficient to convince us that there were devils in abundance, if not all around, at least close to our tent. We did not fear them now in that direction, as we were crouching behind the sheltering tree. A few feet away was the deep creek; this and the tree protected us from the blacks and their spears, but it was the habitation of an equally dangerous foe—the alligator with his fangs. Picture, if possible, the position of us three poor wretches. We had beaten a retreat from our tent, each clothed in only a Crimean shirt; the few feet of earth on which we now were, between the tree and the creek, had become a steaming bog; the mosquitos feasted in swarms, as they had an unlimited opportunity of doing, on our bodies. We dared not move to brush them off, and the rain again fell as only tropical rain can. Fortunately the lightning had ceased. We judged it was now about midnight, but we could not stir till break of day, fearing that the slightest motion might attract our unseen enemies on either side of us.

The horror of that night I shall never forget. Hour after hour went slowly by; no more spears were thrown. I fancy that our foes, not seeing our escape from the tent, had imagined, from the complete stillness we had managed to keep, that they had transfixed us asleep by the first spear volley, but were too cowardly to make an inspection till daylight. At length, as the first glimmer of day appeared, we made for the tent as fast as our cramped limbs could carry us. Everything in it remained as we had left it. In our hurried exit we had forgotten our firearms. These, to our relief, we discovered dry and ready for our immediate use. We had now no fear of our last night's assailants, and had time to turn our attention to the picture presented by our own persons. All the exposed parts—and few were not so—were red and swollen, as if we had been attacked by measles. Jerry's cuticle remained as ebon as ever, but it had suffered just the same amount of irritation. I shall never forget his expression as he burst into a loud laugh, saying:

"Me be think it close up all the same, like it skinned possum."

After anointing ourselves with some fat, we were soon all right again; but still, with venom in our blood, we were determined to vent our wrath upon those who had occasioned our sufferings, even if they had not been their immediate cause.

CHAPTER V.

FURTHER ENCOUNTERS WITH NATIVES.

A SURVEY of our late encampment showed us how narrowly we had escaped death at the hands of our assailants. Eighteen spears were sticking in the ground within a radius of as many feet, some only a few inches from our tent; also the one I mentioned before, which had gone right through it. All had been thrown from a small watercourse, some twenty yards behind our camp. The blacks had crept along this on all fours for over two hundred yards, retreating in like manner after the first and only attack they had so far made on us. The rain having caused the watercourse to become boggy, their tracks, as they crept along it, looked as if a number of pigs had been wallowing in the mire.

After packing and saddling our horses, which, fortunately, we found were unmolested, we followed down the watercourse. This led us into some mangrove bushes growing on the bank of the main creek, which was here a wide sheet of water. This the blacks, either by fording or swimming, had evidently crossed over to the opposite bank, that also being densely fringed by mangrove scrub. Feeling uncertain, from the treacherous appearance of the creek, about crossing on horseback, Jerry as usual volunteered to wade in and ascertain if it were deep or boggy. So, dismounting, he took off his trousers, and carefully waded until half-way over, when he suddenly appeared to come to a standstill. Quickly turning round, he retraced his steps. We called to him and asked why he did this, but he paid not the slightest attention to our repeated questions. He had now regained the bank from which I and my friend had been watching him, but he was still as dumb as any mute. He went to his horse, unbuckled his carbine, hiding it under his shirt, leisurely returned to the creek, and quite as leisurely again commenced to ford it. When about half-way over, he suddenly placed the gun to his shoulder and fired into the mangroves on the opposite bank. Then, from a large and bushy mangrove-tree, we saw the body of a fine naked black fellow fall, apparently shot dead. Instantly the scrub seemed alive with blacks armed with spears, boomerangs, and nullahs. We could see them as they fled up the high bank into the jungle, yelling like demons as they ran. Jerry's superior eyesight had been our salvation. Had he not discovered this ambush, and had we crossed into it, as we were about to do, not one of us would have escaped.

The appearance of the coast country as we proceeded north was not at all to my liking, for it was too densely timbered and broken with high, abrupt ranges and gullies. It was also very stony—in fact, useless for sheep. We determined, if possible, to find a track over the coast range and gain the Upper Burdekin. Accordingly, shaping our course north-west, we made headway with much difficulty in that direction, wishing to strike the head-waters of the Fanning, one of the tributaries of the Burdekin.

Still, we had many miles to travel, and had to keep a sharp look-out that we were not attacked by the numerous natives swarming in these parts. To avoid this, we generally lighted our fire and had supper an hour before sundown. When it was quite dark, we travelled some miles farther and camped without fire or light of any kind. As we neared the range, the country became less thickly timbered, and had many large water-holes or lagoons.

Here for the first time I made the acquaintance of one of the few indigenous edible fruits of Australia, the "Leichhardt plum." This is almost as large as a nectarine, growing in immense quantities on a tree over forty feet high. The beautiful bright green foliage and the graceful contour of this tree at once attract attention. When ripe, the fruit is of a rich purple colour, but, like that of the quandong, the stone is out of all proportion to the small amount of edible matter around it. However, if it be buried in the ground for a few days, which is the method adopted by the natives, it is then by no means unpalatable.

In a large lagoon we discovered some women fishing. Our sudden appearance gave them a terrible fright. With one accord, they gave a loud shout, and the whole of their bodies, with the exception of their heads, disappeared beneath the water. I counted fourteen heads, resembling so many cocoa-nuts, each giving vent to the most dismal whine it is possible to imagine. We were probably the first white men, and ours the first horses, they had ever seen. We were then on the top of an abrupt clay bank overlooking the water, and this caused us, in their eyes, to stand out in relief against the clear sky behind us. Poor creatures! They could have no other idea but that their last day had arrived. By every method in our power we endeavoured to gain their confidence.

Leaving Jerry and my friend, I walked to a sandbank running into the water near the point where the heads were visible. Seating myself on a fallen tree, I watched them for some time. In a few minutes appeared the owner of one of the heads emerging from the water of the lagoon like another Venus rising from the sea. She stood upright, showing me, as she did so, that the water was little more than knee-deep. She advanced slowly towards me, holding a fish in her hand. Then, like Mother Eve before the Fall as regarded clothing, she stood close by me, and presented the fish. I will now endeavour to describe her appearance, which was so totally different from that of most aboriginal women. In age she was about eighteen; her skin, a dark bronze, shone like a new penny. What attracted me most was the extreme beauty of her form. Every limb might have been a sculptor's model, so round and shapely were they, while her feet and hands were exquisitely proportioned. Her face showed her ivory-like teeth when she smiled, and was most pleasing. In return for the fish she had given me, I took a small round digger's looking-glass from my pocket, and hung it on her neck like a locket.

All fear of my injuring her had now departed. Seating herself by my side, she commenced patting my face. This liberty I did not resent, as her late immersion had left her hands guiltless of the unsavoury deposit usually found there. Just then, a heavy nullah struck and bounded off the log on which we were seated, and a warning shout from Jerry and my friend met my ear. Instantly a couple of shots were fired. Bewildered at the sudden aspect affairs had now taken, I jumped up, my sable Venus doing the same, and I saw her retreating form as she bounded, fast as a deer, over the sand after some dozen of running black fellows, she and they making for the open country.

The mystery as to how the men got there was soon explained by Jerry. About fifty yards behind where I had been seated was a quantity of loose sand, blown by the wind into a heap. In this the men, who must have known of our approach, had buried themselves like rabbits, placing on their heads (the only portion of their bodies uncovered) a piece of ti-tree bark. My friend, who had a full view of the sand-heap, said it had the appearance of a resurrection as the blacks rose up out of it. Only one had had time to throw his nullah, when, quick as thought, Jerry fired his carbine, loaded with five pistol balls, my friend also discharging his revolver. One of the shots must have taken effect, as we afterwards found blood-marks on the sand. All the women in the water had disappeared, either by swimming or diving.

This occurrence taught us a lesson—to examine well all similar sand-banks, particularly when women were placed near them as decoys. Some, who have only seen the poor, miserable human object presented by the average black woman, may cavil at my description of this black girl. After being in contact with the whites for any length of time, she becomes, from various causes, more like a monkey than a human being. That there are some magnificently formed if not beautiful women among the aborigines is well known. It may not be out of place here to give a quotation from the work of Captain Watken Tench, R.N., published in 1793, entitled "A Complete Account of the Settlement of Port Jackson." At page 180, he states:

> The women are proportionately smaller than the men. I never measured but two of them. A sister of Bannelou stood exactly five feet two inches high; the other, named "Goo-ree-dee-a-na," was shorter by a quarter of an inch. But I cannot break from Gooreedeeana so abruptly. She belonged to the tribe "Cameregal," and rarely came among us. One day, however, she entered my house to complain of hunger. She excelled in beauty all the females I ever saw. Her age about eighteen, the firmness, the symmetry, and the luxuriance of her bosom might have tempted painting to copy its charms; her mouth was small, and her teeth, though exposed to all the destructive

purposes to which they apply them, were white, sound, and unbroken. Her countenance, though marked by some of the characteristics of her native land, was distinguished by a softness and sensibility unequalled in the rest of her country-women, and I was willing to believe that these traits indicated the disposition of her mind. I had never before seen this elegant timid female, of whom I had often heard, but the interest I took in her led me to question her about her husband and family. She answered me by repeating a name which I have forgotten, and told me she had no children. I gave her, however, all the bread and salt pork my little stock afforded. After this I never saw her but once, when I happened to be near the harbor's mouth; we met her in a canoe. She was painted for a ball, with broad stripes of white earth from head to foot; so she no longer looked like the same Gooreedeeana.

CHAPTER VI.

OUR SEARCH FOR FOOD.

At length we managed to find a pass through the coast range, and struck the head-waters of the Fanning. To describe the almost impenetrable jungle through which we were obliged to force our way in ascending the range, is almost impossible. The vines, tough as ropes, hung in festoons from tree to tree, many covered with thorns sharp as daggers, and almost as long. The most lovely hibiscus, ferns, and palms were to be seen in all directions. Butterflies in clouds, on gaudy wings, flying from flower to flower, frequently obscured the slight glimpses of sky obtainable through the thick foliage overhead.

All this would have been most pleasing to a student of nature who had time to contemplate her wild, lavish beauty; but upon us, situated as we then were, it was almost thrown away. The rough, stony, basaltic ground was telling not only on our boots, but also on the shoes of our horses. Our principal pack-horse had become very lame. To get out of this labyrinth into softer, less stony, and more open country was now our aim, and we were glad when we at length reached the top of the range, though we fully expected that the descent on the opposite side, less difficult as it must be, would be anything but a pleasure trip.

Taking a last look at the now far-distant but easily distinguished ocean, we commenced our descent. It proved to be a steep and rugged one for many miles, passing over many quartz reefs white as milk, giving every indication of a future gold-field, which, however, we had no time to prospect, for our provision-bags warned us that a " southerly wind " might soon be expected in them if we were not careful, with no chance of replenishing them until we returned to Bowen. Game was by no means plentiful ; even if it had been, it was necessary to husband our ammunition.

For a couple of days we continued to descend, until we struck the watershed of the Fanning. Like many Queensland rivers, it had larger and deeper water-holes at or near its source than it possessed as it neared its junction with the Burdekin. The aspect of the country had much changed. All tropical vegetation had now disappeared, and it now opened out into poor, stony, dwarfed, iron-bark ridges, quite unsuited, in my opinion, for sheep, as all the grasses were of a poor and non-fattening description. Growing in the bed of the river were some immense gum-trees.

As usual, Jerry was riding in advance some hundred yards or more, leading the lame pack-horse, while my friend rode with another some distance behind. I brought up the rear, and had just lost sight of Jerry as he went down the bank to cross to the opposite side. The report of his revolver, and afterwards the crushing sound of a heavy falling substance, met my ear. In a moment I and my friend gained the top of the bank, and there, in the centre of some reeds growing in the bed of the river, stood Jerry. He had dismounted, and was in the act of hurling a large stone at some black object lying at his feet, swearing in his broken English as he did so:

"D——n, d——n, Warragal me num cull (kill) merri mickie (directly)."

At his feet lay the expiring form of a powerful black fellow. Another stone, thrown with all Jerry's might, made death certain. For a few moments, until he had recovered his composure, he did not vouchsafe a look, much less a word, of explanation. At length, giving the body a kick, he thus delivered himself:

"My word! Me kill it d——n Warragal, d——n Warragal close up kill it me."

Then he made us understand that as he passed beneath a large gum-tree, the black had thrown a nullah at him from a limb overhead, and afterwards a spear, the latter just grazing his cheek, on which the blood was beginning to trickle from a slight scratch. All was only the work of an instant—the drawing of Jerry's revolver and the result. This was a mode of attack with which we had hitherto been unacquainted, and we had taken no precaution to guard against spears thrown from the branches of trees, for we never dreamed of danger overhead.

As we travelled down the right bank of the Fanning, a high peak could now and again be seen in the far distance, appearing in shape like a sugar-loaf, the cone ending in a sharp point.

The course of the river was almost due west, and the peak, although we had now lost sight of it, seemed also in that direction. Having at length, as we thought, gone sufficiently far to reach it, I told Jerry to climb a tall gum-tree, that he might have a good view of the surrounding country and discover the whereabouts of the peak. After going up about fifty feet, he called to us, " Me see him," and pointed due north. On asking him how far away, his reply was, " Bail that fellow close up, catch him along a sundown, me think it."

Water was not likely to be found, except in the river-course, and as neither my friend nor myself was at all good at climbing, we could not verify what Jerry's " close up " meant; we therefore thought it better to camp for the night, and find and climb the peak next morning. Keeping our usual watch, we rested that night without molestation. We soon discovered the peak, which was due north, as Jerry had pointed. It was a heap of basaltic stones piled on each other like an enormous pyramid, the stones being black as jet; a few stunted trees grew here and there among them at the base, but towards the top it was only covered by a beautiful creeping vine, bearing pods filled with a small bean of a rich scarlet colour, with a tiny black spot on each end. The beans were hard as shot, and had the appearance of polished red coral. I could not help thinking what lovely necklaces they would make if strung.

From the top of the cone we had an extensive view of the surrounding country for miles. It resembled a sea of sombre green, the leaves of the closely-growing iron-bark trees giving it that colour. The course of the Fanning, until it emptied itself into the Burdekin—as well as that of the latter—could easily be traced by the high gum-trees growing along their beds. I afterwards learnt that the peak on which we now stood had been named by Leichhardt, or some other explorer, the "Pigeon House." About thirty miles to the south-west appeared the dim outline of an isolated range. I felt certain this must be Thacker's, named by Leichhardt, and for it we shaped our course, intending if possible to arrive there that evening. We struck the Burdekin, which runs close by the range, some miles sooner. This river we found very wide, with high steep banks, the bed being now only a chain of water-holes. During the wet season, the floods in it must have been frightful, as the lodgment of flood matter still remained in the high gum-trees, fully sixty feet above it.

All our provisions in the flesh meat line had long been exhausted. Jerry suggested that we were likely to fall in with an encampment of natives in the river, and that they would probably bolt at sight of us, leaving in their camp kangaroo, opossum, or any other game they might have collected during the day's hunting. He therefore climbed a tree, and from that elevation had a long view of the river-course, here thickly covered by dwarf ti-tree scrub. When he came down, he informed us that about a couple of miles along the river he could see a smoke, doubtless from a blacks' camp. The evening was now well advanced, and a strong wind blew from the river towards us. Jerry had naturally more experience than we in raiding for provisions, so all preliminary arrangements were handed over to him. His first action was to conduct us away from the river-bank; we then dismounted, and led our horses in Indian file, he taking the lead. As we marched along we kept as quiet as mice. We were now nearly opposite the smoke in the river-bed, which the wind blew in our faces; it was laden with the most delicious aroma of roasting flesh meat, resembling that of pork, which was appetizing to us, who had not tasted meat for two days. As the smell from the cooking grew stronger and more savoury, Jerry whispered, "My word! Plenty Warragal black sit down; me think it budgeree bandicoot the fellow patter; me get it some by-and-by"—and he smacked his lips as he spoke. We distinctly heard the yabbering of many blacks, which showed the camp to be a large one.

The sun had set nearly an hour, and all around was becoming dark and hazy. We mounted our horses and galloped down the bank, firing our revolvers in the air and shouting as we rode along. The whole camp, men, women, and children, fled up the opposite bank, yelling like fiends, leaving in their flight all their weapons behind. On reaching the camp, the fires were brightly burning, having on them pieces of frizzling and sputtering flesh.

Supposing it to be the usual kangaroo or bandicoot, we called to Jerry—preparatory to an onslaught on the juicy morsels—to hitch up the horses on the roots of an overturned tree, close by the late camp. No sooner had he done so than he cried, " Me find old womany," and, sure enough, he dragged from behind the tree one of the most hideous objects in the shape of humanity I ever beheld. Of course, she had not a rag of clothing on, and her horrible ugliness could be the more easily seen. As she stood by the light of the fire, I saw she was a cripple, only able to limp on one leg, the other being shrivelled and drawn up to her hip by contraction of the muscles. In her monkey-like hands she grasped a piece of half-roasted meat, which she kept biting at intervals. Her teeth, strange to say, appeared tolerably sound. The piece of meat she handed to me, and I imagined it to be a half-roasted bandicoot. Judge of my disgust to find it was a human foot! The white tendons were sticking out at the ankle where it had been chopped from the leg.

I threw it from me with horror. We then went round the fires, each armed with a spear, and flung the abominable lumps of flesh on to the sand. So burnt and blackened had they become that it was impossible to discover whether they were human or otherwise, but a shrewd guess, after what we had seen, impressed us with the shocking truth. It was now quite dark, and to camp near this fearful locality was impossible, so we left the old black witch by one of the fires. The sickening smell of what, in our ignorance, we had thought so tempting a short time before, obliged us to beat a quick retreat from the spot. That night we camped well to the windward—supperless from sheer nausea—intending next morning to make a more careful examination into this, to us, new characteristic of the aborigines.

CHAPTER VII.

BACK TO BOWEN.

LITTLE sleep visited us that night. Our near proximity to the fiendish cannibals and their horrible feasting-ground, effectually kept us from closing an eye. Next morning our appetite returned by degrees, and we appeased it with some tea and damper. However, on revisiting their camp, crows were strutting about the now extinguished fires in great numbers, tearing the remaining morsels of flesh to pieces. So tame were they that they scarcely took the slightest notice of our presence. Several eagle hawks perched on the limbs of dead trees, in readiness to filch their carrion feast from the bolder crows. They were still arriving and joining their companions. We found the camp was situated on a sand-bank surrounded by ti-tree scrub.

For some time we could not discover where the blacks had obtained the flesh. Not a bone of any description was lying near. Suddenly an eagle hawk left his perch and alighted in a wattle scrub about a hundred yards from us. We knew the habits of these unclean birds too well to be unaware that they would not give themselves this trouble without reason. Jerry went over to the scrub, and the flapping of the hawk's immense wings could be heard as the bird rose free of the wattles, soaring higher and higher in ever-widening circles. In the scrub Jerry discovered the blacks' larder.

On the ground, covered by a few branches, lay the remains of a young woman's body. All the flesh was cut from the thighs and hips; one foot had been severed from the ankle, and the skull had been fractured by some blunt instrument. The weapons left by the blacks in their flight on the previous night were now gone; whether they had been taken by the old witch before-mentioned, or whether some more adventurous black had in the meantime returned for them, we knew not. After piling dry branches on the body, we set fire to them, leaving the accursed spot to the crows and hawks, which had doubtless witnessed many similar scenes.

We continued to follow the course of the river until Thacker's range was reached. This immense pile of black basaltic rock and stone had undoubtedly been an active volcano in former ages. We went up a kind of pass to a grassy basin, the former crater. Near this grew a large tree; on the trunk had been cut a good-sized "L" by Leichhardt as he passed up the river many years before, the tree marking the position of one of his camps. In the crater was a blacks' encampment, which had been occupied the previous night, for some smoke yet rose from a few fires still smouldering. We could not tell whether the natives had seen us and fled, or were only out hunting. No human being could we see. At one fire I picked up six stone tomahawks, some flint knives, a small netted bag, and a kind of basket, beautiful in shape and make, plaited with split cane. These baskets were new to me. I appropriated the lot, and in place left a digger's looking-glass, with some flour and sugar. Whether the exchange was approved of, I cannot say, but I hope so.

Leaving the range, we camped on a small creek for the night. The fireflies, darting and flitting in every direction, illumined the surrounding bush, and astonished Jerry, who at first sight imagined them to be the fire-sticks of some prowling black fellows.

The meagre state of our provision-bags obliged us to alter our route. At first we intended following the Burdekin river until we again returned to the island situated near its mouth—the spot where I had escaped from the alligator. To carry out this arrangement would have necessitated a much extended detour. Therefore, altering our course, we steered north-east for Bowen, at which place we arrived in three days, our last meal having completely emptied the bags.

Altogether, a fortnight had passed since we commenced our trip. The country through which we had travelled, with the exception of some rich flats in the vicinity of Mount Elliot, was worthless for sheep. The latter, I doubt not, would have answered well for cattle. At the present day, I believe, they are covered by sugar-cane. The raising of sugar was not then dreamt of, but now it is the staple and most profitable industry of this region.

As we neared the township, the longing for "a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether," at the rum and milk nectar, had grown into an absolutely insatiable craving, and our haste to imbibe it once again must have been amusing to our old friend Tommy, as we rode up to the door of his habitation.

"Tommy, have you any fresh milk?" we asked.

"Divil a drap," said he. "All in the can is as sour as vinegar."

"Then when will you milk the cows?"

"Faith, it's meself can't be sure for certain. The blessed calves broke out this morning, and—bad luck to them!—bolted after their mothers, and divil a drap it's me expects to find, till they are hard and fast in the pen again."

"But, Tommy, we saw a calf in the pen as we rode by the milking-yard. Where is its mother?"

"Och, sure, that's only a bit thing no bigger than a pup, that a heifer, not much bigger, left in the yard this blessed morning."

"Where is she, Tommy?" we asked.

"Och, sure, what's the good she'd be to yez? The divil a drap more than a taecupful would yez get from her whole carcase."

I then ordered Jerry to have a look round, and endeavour to find this minute cow. He had been away about twenty minutes, when he appeared driving before him certainly the smallest motherly bovine it is possible to imagine. To rope and bale her did not take much time. After vainly attempting to draw the necessary and coveted fluid, we were obliged to cease in despair, and acknowledge the correctness of Tommy's opinion, for devil an egg-cupful, much less a teacup, could we get, although we all had a trial. To make matters more aggravating, behind us sat Tommy on the yard's corner-post, his round face having the appearance of a full moon as, grinning from ear to ear, he addressed us:

"Och! ye omadhauns! de yez think yez can get blood from a turnip? Sure, that's not the mother of the bit calf at all, at all; that one won't calve for a fortnight!"

Ashamed at the ignorance which we had displayed in our eagerness, we were forced to look pleasant and invite Tommy to join us at the pub., when the rum, minus the milk, was discussed by us all. As we parted from him, he got strict injunctions to see to the rails of the calf-pen that evening. He assured us we might take our Bible oath he would do that same; and, true to his word, he appeared at the pub. next morning at sunrise, bearing a large bucket filled with warm, foaming milk, to which the rum was speedily added, and the long, strong pull so much coveted by us was at length obtained.

No news from the outer world had reached Bowen during our absence. Neither could there be any until some chance vessel from the south—chartered by one or more exploring parties—called in, a not very infrequent occurrence.

From what we had seen of the country, it did not come up to our expectations, and we decided to embrace the first opportunity that offered in the shape of a vessel, small or large, to ship for Rockhampton or some other southern port. We were, therefore, obliged to wait patiently until a sail hove in sight. We disposed of our horses, now in a low condition, to the publican, who would doubtless realize a good sum by their sale to other explorers when they became fat.

A week had passed when one morning Jerry, who had been on some high rocks overlooking the harbour, hurried up to the pub. with the information that a sail was in sight. "Only narangee (little) one me be think it," he said. Little or big, this was news to cause excitement in the township, and the inhabitants, numbering about a score, all flocked to a high point to be convinced of the fact. A small fore-and-aft lugger, of about forty tons, was beating up for the town. She came to anchor fully a quarter of a mile from it, the depth of the water not permitting a nearer approach.

In a few minutes the captain, accompanied by two men in a boat, pulled for the beach, where we had all congregated. The boat grounding in shallow water, its occupants were obliged to get out and wade to shore. We now learnt that the lugger was the *Benbolt*, four days out from Rockhampton. With much pleasure I discovered that the two passengers were no strangers to me, one, H. I——, being a very old friend. After mutual congratulations, we all made tracks for the pub., where nectar galore made us as happy as sandboys. The captain, before returning to his vessel, informed us he would sail south next day, and he agreed to take myself and party as passengers.

Our two new arrivals intended remaining at Bowen until some others of their party, now on their way overland, should join them. When this took place, all were to make a long exploring journey in a north-westerly direction.

Before taking leave of H. I——, I may here mention that he and his party *did* find good and suitable country. Returning to Bowen after an absence of several months, they proceeded overland to Rockhampton, but H. I—— preferred to go by sea. His vessel was becalmed when off Shaw's Island, one of the many composing the great barrier reef. There they fell in with some natives in canoes. These appearing friendly, H. I—— and a sailor went with them on shore, intending to gather oysters. The vessel lay a mile distant, when the captain, hearing a shot, lowered his boat, and pulled with all haste for the island. There he discovered the bodies of poor H. I—— and the sailor, murdered and horribly mutilated, lying some distance inland. Not a single native could be found, all being hidden in the dense scrub with which the island was covered.

The captain and his men could only remove the bodies to the boat and take them to his vessel, for they well knew that if he buried them on land cannibalism would in all probability finish the tragedy. Therefore, poor H. I—— and the sailor were consigned to a safe though watery grave. He was the only son of an English clergyman who had lately died, and the sole support of his widowed mother, to whom I was obliged to communicate his sad fate. Poor fellow! During our long acquaintance, his whole ambition and anxiety, he told me, was to make a home for her and his only sister.

My last night in Bowen passed joyously. On the morrow, most of the inhabitants of the township conveyed our party to the beach, and, with a hearty cheer, accompanied by the notes of "Auld lang syne," issuing from a battered accordion, the only musical instrument they possessed, we waded to the boat and were soon on the deck of the *Benbolt*.

A sight of that craft did not reassure us as to our sleeping and other accommodation. Fortunately, we had plenty of rugs, and as for the provisions—well, if they did not tempt, they were at all events—as long as they lasted—filling. The first night on board suggested to us the unpleasant situation in which the hero of the ballad found him or herself. Our lodging, if not actually on the cold ground, was on the equally cold planks. Hard, very hard, was our fare—onions galore, with potatoes and salt junk, for the first *four* days. That being the time which the captain calculated it would take him to make Rockhampton, he had victualled his craft accordingly.

CHAPTER VIII.

MY VOYAGE IN THE "BENBOLT."

WE no sooner got clear of the harbour than the wind died away to a calm, the sails flapping idly against the masts as the lugger lazily rolled on the mirror-like sea. This would have given us little uneasiness had there been plenty of shot in the shape of provisions in our locker.

Before leaving, the captain assured us that at this season nothing but favourable winds might be expected, and that Rockhampton would be reached in less than three or four days. We bowed in submission to what should have been his superior knowledge. The few meals already partaken of were sufficient to convince us that our lot had not fallen in a particularly pleasant or cleanly vessel. My friend H. I—— had remarked to me that the cockroaches on board could only be likened in their number to swarms of bees. The similitude held good so far as the smaller description of these pests went; but to give an idea of the larger variety would require the pen of a more able entomologist than I. The big black and brown ones were omnipresent in the small deck-house, our only cabin and shelter. The seat lockers swarmed with them, and gave out the most abominable odour when opened. The rustling noise these wretched insects made when disturbed by light, as they scuttle away to hide in some dark corner, could be heard in every part of the cabin.

A pleasant but erroneous superstition is current in Australia, namely, that where the cockroach is, the bug is not. To our disgust, we found the last, if possible, present in even greater hosts; in short, nothing but reducing our craft to ashes or scuttling her for a month would have effected her cleansing. Thus it can be readily understood that a quick passage was devoutly to be wished, under the circumstances.

Oh! how anxiously did we scan the ocean for the least puff of wind. When the last breath of air departed from our sails, we had only gained a few miles of offing. As we lay like a log, our rudder was rendered useless; and a current, which slowly but surely drew us nearer the shore, greatly troubled our skipper, who owned the lugger. The idea that his craft might possibly be beached caused his language, at all times warm, to become even more lurid and sultry. The climax was reached when my friend jokingly said:

"Don't you think, captain, you'd better let her rip, and by that means drown all the crawling devils in the lockers?"

The captain's rejoinder was too torrid to write.

At length, having a southerly wind, we tacked away to the south-east, until the mainland was lost to view. Then the great barrier reef came in sight, the sea breaking over it in great showers of white spray.

On our next return tack, as we neared the coast, the southerly wind had increased to a gale. Our skipper's former knowledge of the locality made him aware that there was a small harbour with sufficient depth of water to enable his vessel to enter and find shelter. We had no sooner entered than the gale increased to a storm, and a high sea broke over the rocks.

As yet we had only made eighty miles, and this was our third day at sea. We had yet three hundred miles to make before we should be at Rockhampton, and now we had only one day's provisions on board. The harbour was completely land-locked, the water being barely ten feet deep, and clear to the bottom, which was completely covered by white coral in all the beautiful and fantastic shapes in which it is usually found. Several large sea-snakes, quite fourteen feet in length, were swimming on the surface. As the skipper gave orders to let go, the anchor dropped from our bows, bringing to my mind Byron's lines:

"Hoarse o'er her side the rustling cable rings,
Her sails are furled, and anchoring, round she swings."

Perhaps it may be derogatory to the poet to couple his ideas in any way with our evil-smelling, ill-found craft—evil-smelling with cockroaches and other insects; ill-found, for the cook informed us that he had only sufficient junk and potatoes for two meals. Of onions, however, there was any quantity.

Although in this land-locked harbour we were safe from the waves and tempest without, we were not so from hunger-pangs within. It soon became a matter of the gravest interest to discover how they could be relieved. We well knew that no whites inhabited the coast country within a radius of a hundred miles. On going ashore, we found that oysters could easily be obtained in quantities at a muddy creek, subject to the rise and fall of the tide. In the creek was a growth of mangroves, all of which had on their roots, stems, and branches, right up to high-water mark, a thick incrustation, composed of oysters of all sizes. This discovery, agreeable as it might be, we did not consider sufficiently substantial. It is said man cannot live by bread alone; neither, in my opinion, could he on oysters.

That the blacks were plentiful we had abundant evidence from the impression of their numerous footsteps in the sand. As the sun was setting, we each cut off a branch heavily laden with oysters. Carrying them to our boat, we pulled for the lugger. The skipper had not joined us on shore. On our return, he was pacing the deck, anathematizing his ill-luck in no measured terms; afterwards the elements came in for their turn.

We could hear the wind howling and the sea breaking furiously not a gunshot distant, while the lugger lay completely sheltered from both. The oyster branches we handed up from the boat, in order to have the bivalve fruit tested. Though it was not equal in flavour to "Carlingford," or "English native," we found it was not to be despised; but the colour, a nasty green, we did not relish.

The captain, who stood by, had somewhat recovered his composure. He vouchsafed the unpleasant information that it might be a fortnight ere we should get to sea, by which time we should all be dead, unless we were content to live on sharks. And, pointing to the water, where several large fins might be seen above the surface, he suddenly exclaimed with an oath:

"Shark's not bad, but shark and onions is first-rate. By G——! it is not the first time I have lived on it."

My friend looked at me as he swallowed an oyster, repeating as he did so the skipper's words:

"No, shark's not bad. By Jove! shark, onion, and oyster sauce will be more than first-rate; but we must catch the shark, like the proverbial hare, first."

The task of entrapping the shark was left to the captain. The cook placed on the deck the last of our provisions in a tin dish. They consisted of four or five pounds of red hard junk and a dozen or so of potatoes.

I have forgotten to mention that the crew all told was composed of the captain, two sailors, the cook, and a cur dog. On board, there was no distinction of persons—crew, passengers, and skipper, all messed on or about the deck. The last bit of beef, as well as the last potato, had now vanished, and we all sat on the hatch conversing, smoking, and discussing our position. That a shark must be caught forthwith was agreed by all hands; otherwise onions and oysters must compose our breakfast on the morrow—a frugal meal not relished in anticipation by our now sharpened sea appetites.

Had we had a junk of pork, a dead fowl, or even a rat, it would have been easy to entice our monster fish. As we had none of these baits, matters became more difficult. As the discussion was at its height, the cur dog, which we all detested, crawled from an old cask, where he usually took refuge when ill-used. In a moment all eyes were turned towards him, and by universal consent he was condemned, Jerry being appointed executioner.

The skipper produced from his sleeping berth a medley of fishing-tackle, old clothes, cockroaches, and heaven knows what besides. From this heap he succeeded in disentangling some rusty chain and a shark hook. To fasten the hook to the chain, and a strong line to the other end, did not take many minutes. Half the dog being now impaled on the hook, all was ready for us to go a-fishing.

Our vessel lay becalmed, appearing as if floating in a green, ghostly, luminous cloud, which extended hundreds of yards round about. The slightest disturbance of the water caused the millions of phosphorescent animalcules with which it was charged to gleam like liquid silver as they rolled over and over each other. At intervals a brighter streak could be seen moving in circles in the distance, caused by the motion of a shark as it approached the vessel, until, coming within the cloud, every movement of the fish was as distinctly visible as in an aquarium.

When the skipper launched the hook and bait, the splash on striking the water attracted the shark, and, lazily swimming towards it, he slightly turned on his side, opened his mouth, and swallowed it. A tug at the line made the hook fast; to haul him alongside was, to willing hands, an easy task. His struggles as his head came even with the deck were furious. As he opened and snapped his immense mouth every instant, we found it no easy matter to lift him clear of the water. At length patience and perseverance accomplished it. He measured just twelve feet; what his weight might be did not trouble us now, since we had him safe on board, and our future meals were a certainty. We retired to rest, to sleep the sleep of the just. The wind outside had not abated in the least; the clouds were flying at racing speed, and the deep, hollow roar of the sea breaking on the rocks could be plainly heard.

CHAPTER IX

THE DIETETIC QUALITIES OF SHARK.

AT daybreak, we unrolled ourselves from our rugs, for we preferred to sleep on deck, where the air was fresh, rather than venture doing so in the horrid den of a cabin. The skipper, who appeared entirely to ignore either foul smells or insect abominations, slept there in perfect peace, the repeated onslaught of the latter being effectually repulsed by the toughness of his cuticle, which was hard as leather with exposure and dirt. With the assistance of a block and tackle, we had, before turning in, hauled our fish up to the mast, and chopped off some two feet of the tail end. This portion lay motionless on the deck, but its owner had not as yet given up the ghost, for his little eyes still rolled in their sockets.

Contrary to the general custom, these had not been put out by the sailors, whose cruelty to their hated enemy, should he fall into their hands, is well-known. The cook, now hard at work with his knife, endeavoured to cut the hard skin of the severed tail. At length, throwing the knife down in disgust, he swore he might as well try to cut the chain cable. The captain had relieved himself by a volley of good round oaths at the unchanged aspect of the elements and our general prospects. He was now requested to give his former experience in the culinary art, as far as the cooking of shark was concerned.

"Cut it into junks with the axe and put it into the boiler," he growled.

This was accordingly done, while we sat round, speculating what the result might be—palatable or the reverse. At length, the lid of the boiler lifting, it emitted a puff of steam which flew right in the face of my friend, who appeared to relish the odour, for he exclaimed, "Fishy!" The now quivering lid, as it rose and fell, made us all aware that he was right, for the stuff certainly smelt fishy—very fishy. The cook had no idea how long shark required boiling, and appealed to the captain, who, taking off the pot-lid, fished out a piece of its contents, and pronounced it as tender as a chicken. His endeavour to masticate the morsel made the truth of his assertion doubtful. However, as the cook produced piece after piece, we each held out our plates, receiving thereon about a pound of by no means unpalatable-looking fish, white in colour, but coarse in grain, and rather strong in smell. The first mouthful was tested by all of us with great misgivings. Not one, with the exception of the captain (and we had only his word for that), had ever tasted it before.

An anxious and silent moment passed. Each munched his bit, looking slyly at the face of his neighbour for signs of approbation or the reverse.

By universal consent the verdict was expressed that shark could be eaten by those who had good strong teeth, but heaven help those who had not! It tasted very much like india-rubber and bad anchovy paste.

With the addition of a few onions, we managed to breakfast, our ravenous sea appetites giving a zest to food which, under other circumstances, would probably have been considered disgusting. Our dread of speedy starvation had now departed, but we could not lose sight of the fact that when we again got to sea many days must elapse ere provisions could be obtained. Therefore, some method of preserving a portion of the fish must be adopted. Unfortunately, only a few pounds of salt remained on board, totally inadequate to assist us in any way. I had jerked flesh meat when no salt was forthcoming, and found it answer wonderfully well. To jerk shark was a new experiment, and the result was more than doubtful, but we must try.

While we remained in shelter, shark could be had in abundance. Not so at sea. There, our only chance of obtaining provisions was the uncertain one of signalling a passing vessel, and they were few and far between on the coast at that early date. We now essayed to jerk our fish while fresh. A line was fastened between the masts as high as our heads. Our fish, now quite dead, we laid on deck back upwards. By cutting along the backbone from end to end, and making a similar cut an inch distant from the first and as deep as the ribs, we were enabled to extract a ribbon of flesh six feet long, one inch thick, and four broad. This was hung on the line I have mentioned; and so on, ribbon after ribbon was cut and suspended, until we deemed we had enough for a first experiment. The cook had orders to fill his boiler with sea water, and make a large fire underneath, so as to get it to boil rapidly, until half the contents had evaporated. This liquor, when cold, made a tolerably strong brine, in which the fish ribbons were to be dipped frequently, and returned to the line to dry after each dip.

These preliminaries being arranged, we proposed going on shore to forage for some addition to our Lenten fare. Of course, we all carried our loaded revolvers, but with our last cartridges, for we were unable to procure any in Bowen. We pulled to a sand-spit, covered at high-water, but now bare. Large pieces of white coral here pointed their fragile tips close to the surface, making the beaching of our boat a matter of great difficulty; there was also the danger of her being pierced by the sharper and stronger kind. We dared not step into the water; we might as well have attempted to walk on iron spikes. Jerry stood in the bow, breaking with an oar the most dangerous spines. At last a landing was effected.

On the day before, the tide was high, and the boat was well above the coral. A long stretch of sandy beach, extending to the creek before-mentioned, skirted the harbour; everything inland appeared to be an impenetrable jungle. We had been impressed with the idea that no white man could ever have visited this out-of-the-way spot, but in this we were mistaken. When near the mouth of the creek, a number of black objects became visible, only a few inches above the water. At first their appearance did not attract our attention, but, when we had gone farther, they all came into line in a double row about twenty feet apart. In each row we counted sixty or thereabouts. Had not the tide been unusually low, all would have been hidden under water.

We resolved to get a closer inspection of these, if the coral did not make it impracticable to reach them, their position being quite a hundred yards from shore. Jerry cut a stout stick for each of us, to break down the spikes. We did not, of course, take off our boots, the water being little more than knee-deep. After much stumbling, we were successful, and found that the black objects were the timbers of a vessel of about eighty tons' burthen. How deep the keel was buried in the coral we could not discover. The timbers were encrusted with oysters and sea-weed, and were mostly charred by fire. The vessel must have occupied her coral bed for very many years.

We returned to the shore, speculating on the fate of her crew. Had they landed, their destruction must have been certain. They might, however, have escaped by boat southward, thus avoiding the savage blacks.

On the beach Jerry tried to pick up a small brown object, almost covered by sand. Being unable to move it, he scraped away the sand and found it to be the point of an anchor fluke, the remaining portion being still deeper imbedded. It was much rust-eaten. We now directed our steps to the mangroves for oysters, cutting as many branches as we could conveniently carry to our boat. We then sat down, and had some for our lunch. Opposite to us grew some very large trees, their butts being completely hidden by thick scrub and vines. Jerry went over to them, hoping to find some of the large edible grubs usually met with in their stems and roots. These grubs, quite two inches long, are much relished by the blacks. Some whites consider them a delicacy, and compare their flavour when roasted in ashes to that of almonds. My friend and I had tasted them formerly, but when procurable preferred the oyster.

Jerry had not long absented himself when he returned with a number of grubs in his handkerchief, and in his hand a round object. It was a skull, brown and very old, the bone in parts being soft and crumbling. He told us that, when digging with his tomahawk round a wattle-tree root, he had unearthed this relic, and he gave it as his opinion, "Long time me think it, white fellow sit down."

He took us to the spot, where observant eyes could not be long uncertain of the fact: white men, as Jerry said, must have sat down in that place many years before. The butt of an old iron-bark tree, now green with moss and rotten with decay, had been cut by a cross-cut saw; another, also quite dead, bore on the trunk the mark where a sheet of bark had been taken off by a sharp axe, and not by the stone tomahawk of a black fellow. The bark had been stripped off many years before the tree had died, a growth of wood having since almost covered the place.

Where Jerry had found the skull, we dug up a portion of a skeleton. The bones crumbled to pieces when handled. That they were the remains of a white man was proved by our finding the neck of a broken bottle and a penny of the year 1800. A further search giving us no other information, we left the locality.

On my return to Sydney, I made every inquiry, but nothing was known of any missing vessel of the supposed dimensions and tonnage of the wreck. It was surmised, however, that it might possibly be a vessel stolen by runaway convicts escaping from the colony during its early days. Be that as it may, nothing will ever be known of their subsequent fate. More than likely they attempted to carry out the insane idea, then prevalent amongst the convicts, of reaching China overland. If they did so, most assuredly they were either murdered and eaten by aborigines, or else they died of starvation.

But to return to ourselves. We shouldered our oyster branches, and regained our boat. The tide had risen, and the coral gave us no trouble. Through the clear water it shone some feet beneath our keel.

The lugger, as we pulled towards her, gave out a musty, fish-like smell, which increased as we gained her deck to something perfectly stifling. Shark was hanging from the rigging; shark was boiling in the boiler; the odour of shark exhaled from skipper and cook, neither having much belief in the virtue of soap and water. They had just finished giving the shark ribbons the final dip for the day in the cold brine. The sun had set on our second day's detention. An inquiry as to the prospect of further delay evoked from the skipper the unpleasant rejoinder:

"Delay be d——d! The sanguinary sea running with the wind in the present quarter may detain us until the d——d lugger grounds on sharks' bones!"

This hard saying seemed a little vague, but I suppose he meant that we should be obliged to consume so many sharks that their bones might cause a heap beneath our keel as they were thrown overboard. The cook now piped all hands to supper.

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF THE EXPEDITION.

I HAVE said that the cook piped all hands to supper. His cookery had been slightly altered by the addition of some sliced onions to the boiling mess. On lifting the pot-lid, the most nauseating smell escaped that it is possible to imagine. Raw onions we could eat, but when boiled with shark, they were simply diabolical—to all save the cook and the captain.

"Let us broil some," said my friend, "and see if that will go down."

A slice was impaled on an iron rod and held over the fire. When cooked in this fashion, neither the appearance nor the smell was at all inviting. However, hunger made a good sauce, and we bolted sufficient to satisfy our cravings. Although blowing great guns at sea, the weather in harbour was fine and very warm. The remains of the fish, now putrid, would have to be consigned to its native element—not, however, before another had been caught. Half the dog remained intact, but, like the shark, it was now most offensive in smell.

The water, luminous as ever, gave no indication that sharks were close to the vessel. As a draw, several pieces of shark's liver were thrown overboard. Then from all directions, like vultures swooping on a carcase, darting lines of light appeared and made towards us, and sharks of all sizes darted at and swallowed the liver. The baited hook was now thrown, and instantly disappeared. The line payed out at lightning speed, and warned us to haul in. The result was that one somewhat smaller than the first soon lay flapping its tail and convulsively snapping its jaws on deck, by no means a roomy one at best, and now hampered by the remains of our first fish, which were speedily thrown into the water. Then a mad rush for the spoil took place. It is said, "Dog will not eat dog;" that shark will eat shark is an undoubted fact. In their eagerness to have a piece, they made the water boil like a cauldron, their struggles churning it like a steamboat's screw. The fresh arrival, when on deck, was most unruly until deprived of his tail; this, however, subdued him, and obliged him to submit with resignation to his fate. The night was now well advanced and very hot. The disgusting smells, impossible to escape, and the indigestible supper, heavy as lead, combined effectually to preclude sleep.

Seated on the bowsprit, I watched with interest the motion of a large sea-snake swimming close to the vessel. These snakes are numerous on the north Queensland coast and the barrier reef. In size they far exceed the land species, the carpet snake excepted, which frequently measures fourteen feet. I never had an opportunity to examine one. The blacks assert that they are venomous. Whether this is so or not, I cannot state. However, their judgment may be generally relied on as regards venomous snakes, poisonous berries, or seeds. The snake continued swimming with its head above water, only a few feet distant from where I sat. The temptation to risk a shot became irresistible, and I fired Jerry's carbine, which appeared to take effect, for the snake instantly dived; I could distinctly see its sinuous form wriggling amongst the coral growth. If it were dead, and not devoured by sharks, I hoped to fish it up at daylight for a closer inspection. The report of the gun awoke all on board. The captain's head protruded from a hole or "deadlight," as he was pleased to term it, in his den, and he growled in no measured language his desire to know "What the H—— I was up to now?" The request for information, not being couched in polite terms, received for reply:

"You had better have some more shark!"

His shock head disappeared, breathing a few choice oaths. The discharge of the carbine was heard on shore, and there frightened or disturbed the black inhabitants, who were undoubtedly numerous in the thick jungle. They had kept out of our sight during the day, but their tracks in the sand proved they had visited the beach at night, for what purpose we were ignorant. At intervals, when breaks in the fast-flying clouds permitted, the moon dimly lighted the land, and showed the running figures of several naked blacks, who shouted to each other. The day was dawning, and I had not closed my eyes. I inwardly wished that the skipper and his lugger had gone to the bottom of the sea before my party had become his passengers.

When it was sufficiently light, I searched for the sea-snake, taking a small boat, but without success; he had either been eaten or had crawled away. Therefore his poisonous or non-poisonous qualities remained *in statu quo* so far as I was concerned. The cook was busily engaged chopping our breakfast from the severed tail, full in view of its not yet dead owner. Our dried shark ribbons proved a success; although hard, they had no evil smell. My friend had named them "Bombay ducks." He cut off a piece for his breakfast. For my part, this meal was far from my thoughts; with me, supper still maintained its place, and internal qualms warned me that it was still unconquered. A roasted onion with a few oysters formed my repast; Jerry roasted his grubs with evident satisfaction; the others enjoyed their "Bombay duck" and onions. A breakfast such as this proves the truth of the adage, "When needs must, the devil drives."

The skipper had lately grown more sociable and less profane. The dog-vane indicated a change of wind, and this acted like a soothing draught on his irritable nerves. He gave it as his opinion that another night would not pass before we were out of that infernal hole. With this prospect it was considered unsafe to venture on shore; our only boat could not be spared.

The captain said that if the wind held in the present quarter, and the lugger were towed a mile nearer the harbour's entrance, one tack would take us clear out to sea. A general examination of our jerking operations assured us of its success. The second shark contributed about a hundredweight more to our store; the boiler was filled with enough shark steak to last twenty-four hours. Then a general swabbing was given by the sailors to our filthy deck, which greatly improved the lugger's appearance, though a fusty and fish-like smell still prevailed.

The wind suddenly chopped round to the north-east, the most favourable breeze we could have. The small boat was hauled on deck, the sails unfurled, and the anchor up, in less time than I take to write. Willing hands made quick work. Once again, thank goodness, we were at sea with a fair wind, and the prospect, should it continue, of reaching the Fitzroy River in two days. This we accomplished in the time, but all of us had then the appearance of half-starved wretches. For my own part, I think a few more days living on such abominable food would have finished me.

When entering the Fitzroy River, the smoke of a steamer was visible coming down the river from Rockhampton. We hailed her as she bore towards us, and never in my life did I experience greater pleasure than when my party stood on the deck of the *Balclutha*, bound for Sydney. A transference from Purgatory to Paradise could not have equalled it. A bag of flour, beef, and other necessaries was speedily transferred to the lugger as a present from us. The skipper having accompanied us to the steamer, we all drank his health, for which he seemed surprised and grateful. As the *Balclutha* could no longer delay, he returned to his boat. When descending the gangway, we all shook his unclean hand.

"Good-bye, gentlemen," said he; "I trust we may meet again."

"Yes," thought we, "but may it be under very different circumstances."

> "You may break, you may shatter, the vase, if you will,
> But the odour of roses will cling to it still."

So, most assuredly, did the odour of shark cling to us. We had frequent hot baths, with unlimited soap; yet even then no Laplander could have smelt more fishy than we. But time, which cures most things, enabled us during our five days on board the steamer, at all events to lessen in some degree the rank perfume.

Thus for the present ended our exploring expedition. It had taken two months, and had had no good or pecuniary result.

CHAPTER XI.

SOME CELESTIAL CHARACTERISTICS.

WHEN I arrived in Sydney, I was offered the management of a large sheep and cattle station, situated in north-west Queensland. I closed with the offer, and made little delay until I arrived at the scene of my future management.

In size, the station was supposed to be 300,000 acres, but this was only an approximate estimate. This out-of-the-way part of Australia had not then been surveyed, nor was it for many years afterwards. The squatters jumped at conclusions as to size, making certain that they kept on the right side, and did not pay rent to Government for more country than they actually occupied. Many stations —among them the one I now mention—when surveyed in after years, were proved to contain nearly double the supposed area. Sixty thousand sheep and five thousand head of cattle depastured on the station. My friend had engaged to live with me for some time; I had also agreed to take a young gentleman, just out from England, who wished to be initiated into the mysteries of squatting. I will call him E——. We all three lived together in the same house, having as cook and general servant a Chinaman called Ah Sam; he did the housework, little being required save bed-making and a rough sweep-out on Sundays. Two overseers—one for the cattle and one for the sheep—were requisite for the necessary working of the station. They had a hut for their accommodation, also a Chinaman cook.

The station hands usually mustered sixty or seventy, many of them being Chinese. Most of the shepherds were dispersed with their flocks at creeks and water-holes all over the run. Generally two shepherds and a hut-keeper lived together, and attended two flocks of sheep, each mustering from twelve to fifteen hundred. To these outlying and distant shepherds the ration-carrier conveyed, once a week, either in a spring-cart or on horseback, sufficient provisions, comprising flour, tea, and sugar, to last that time. The sheep overseer or myself often rode round to see that the flocks were properly shepherded and counted. The cattle had a portion of the run allotted to them, and were kept off the sheep country as far as was practicable.

About five miles distant from the homestead three Hong Kong Chinamen had their flocks. The men were new arrivals, and by no means good shepherds. Both the overseer and I had often found fault with them, at which they appeared sullen, muttering something unintelligible in their native jargon.

One morning, at daybreak, I rode over to their camp, purposing to count their sheep; the sun had not yet risen, and the men were at breakfast. I got off my horse and hitched him to a dead tree. I usually carried a heavy riding-whip with a loaded handle. The hurdles in which the sheep were folded were about a hundred yards from the hut. I walked over to them, and had just commenced to count as the sun rose, when suddenly a flash as if from the reflection of a looking-glass caused me to turn quickly round, and as I did so I received a cut from a tomahawk deep in my shoulder. Close behind me stood a Chinaman, who had crept up unperceived by me. Instantly I felled him with my whip, when a shout proceeding from the hut momentarily attracted my attention to it. At the door stood the two remaining men, one with the wood-axe in his hand, the other with a heavy stake. The man at my feet, recovering from my blow, dealt me a fresh cut on the knee as he lay on the ground. Then, with all my might, I struck him on the head, and he fell apparently lifeless. Not seeing the other two, I supposed they had retired into the hut. My wounds were bleeding freely; however, I managed to mount my horse and return home, when I soon became insensible from loss of blood.

The overseer at once went to the station, and found that the two Chows had fled, but that my would-be murderer lay quite dead, my whip having fractured his skull. Of course, the necessary magisterial investigation was held, and I was acquitted of all blame. I had reason to bless the fortunate rising of the sun, the reflection of whose rays on the Chinaman's tomahawk (a bright new American one) had proved my salvation. The blow was undoubtedly intended for my neck or head. My sudden turning round caused him to miss his aim, and my life was saved.

Some time before this a somewhat similar case occurred in New South Wales. A Mr. Granger owned a station near Liverpool Plains, and had a number of shepherds, mostly Hong Kong men. One morning he visited an out-station where three of these shepherded. As he entered their hut, he was at once tomahawked; his dog was also killed. To hide the bodies of dog and master, the men dug a hole in the centre of the sheep-yard, placed them therein, and filled in the earth. A quantity of sheep manure was then placed over it. By rushing the sheep to and fro for some time they completely obliterated all signs of their fiendish work. Granger's disappearance instigated a general search, but without avail. When the Chows were questioned on the subject, they shook their heads, saying, "No savie; Massa Granger welly good massa."

A fortnight after the murder, one of the trio arrived at the head station and gave the information that he could, if accompanied to their place, show the whereabouts of Mr. Granger's body. The overseer went off with him, and the Chinaman, going into the sheep-yard, pointed to the ground at a certain spot, saying, "Mr. Granger sit down there." Not the least sign of any disturbance of the earth was perceptible. When it was dug up, however, the bodies of Granger and his dog, with his saddle and bridle, were found a couple of feet from the surface. I should mention that his horse had been turned adrift after the murder. Why the Celestial gave his information was made known at the trial of his companions for the murder. Granger had a watch; for the possession of this coveted article the three drew lots, in the opinion of the informer unjustly. He was not the winner, hence his revenge.

In all nationalities there are good and bad, and the Chinese are no exception to the rule. During the last thirty years I have employed many hundreds of them, and, taking them as a body, I have found them to be equal if not superior to the average white.

For over a year I had held my cook, Ah Sam, to be a perfect treasure, until one day, during cattle muster, some friends had arrived from a neighbouring station to render me assistance. Wishing to give them a good dinner, I consulted Ah Sam, who arranged everything satisfactorily.

"By the way, Sam," said I, "let us have a dish of minced mutton with mashed potatoes on top." This, a most excellent dish as he cooked it, he generally gave us on Sunday.

My request was answered by him shaking his head and saying: "No, no, massa; too many altogether. No good."

After some persuasion on my part, he agreed to do what I asked. Dinner-time drawing nigh, I wished to see what progress he was making, so I stepped over to the kitchen. Well had it been for me and my guests had I not been so inquisitive, and rested content with the old saying: "When the eye sees not, the heart grieves not." A good dinner would have smoked before us, I doubt not, and all would have praised Sam's culinary capabilities. As I entered the kitchen, his back was towards me, and very busily engaged he appeared to be. Holding a leg of cold roast mutton, he cut off a slice, and transferred it to his mouth, masticating it at a furious rate. Before him on the table lay a dish, almost filled with something I could not well make out. However, I was soon enlightened, for presently he discharged the contents of his mouth into the dish.

"What the devil are you up to?" I exclaimed.

The sound of my voice caused him to start, and almost choke himself as he answered: "Me maky mincemeat, massa, close up ready, you see;" and, placing a fresh slice in his mouth, his jaws moved rapidly, and a further addition was contributed to the infernal mess.

For a moment I was so taken aback that I could not speak, my mind being filled with disgust and horror. Not so Sam, who calmly endeavoured to describe his mode of mince-making.

"You see, massa, me put pepper, salt, and saucy along a dish, then mash potato along the top; me put him in oven—mincemeat welly good."

"You filthy wretch!" I cried, and snatching the leg of mutton from his hand, I belaboured him soundly with it. He fled from the kitchen, taking refuge in the overseer's hut. The cause of Sam's reluctance to furnish a larger dish than usual for this particular occasion now dawned upon me. He evidently had no objection to mince for us three, but to do so for a greater number was more than his Chinese jaws could well undertake. Here was a nice mess in more ways than one. To reinstate Sam was impossible. Fortunately I found that the other edibles were almost ready; so, keeping my counsel, I sent for the overseer's cook to replace Sam, and the dinner, minus the mincemeat, was all that could be wished.

Dinner being over, we all retired to the verandah to smoke the soothing pipe. This, I imagined, might sufficiently steady weak nerves and qualmish stomachs to hear the story of Ah Sam's exploit in the cooking art. All who had, like myself and friend, during our long residence in Australia, been accustomed to strange food and bed-fellows, would be in some degree hardened. Not so our English friend E——. The narration affected his more refined imagination so much that I felt sorry. He rose quickly, and left the verandah. After some time, he returned. His face, generally fresh and rosy, had assumed a sea-sick hue; but as no further reference was made to the unpleasant subject, this expression passed off, and he was himself again.

Since I became a married man, I have often had Chinese cooks; being unable to procure a white one, no choice has been left me. My wife prefers them, for in most cases they are clean, tidy, polite, and good cooks, although requiring supervision. But she has always taken care that a sausage-machine should be used for mincemeat.

CHAPTER XII.

VANISHED HANDS.

"He who hath bent him o'er the dead,
Ere the first day of life be sped—
The first great day of nothingness,
The last of danger and distress.

"Ere that decay's effacing fingers
Hath marred the lines where beauty lingers,
And marked the mild angelic air,
The rapture of repose that's there."

THE above lines, beautiful and graphic as they are, will, I hope, in a measure prepare my readers for the ensuing chapter.

Melancholy though true facts must not always be suppressed; otherwise life would appear, especially to the young, what it certainly is not, a continual scene of giddy pleasure and anticipations never to be realized. Those who, like myself, have borne the burden and heat of the day, know full well that most seeming joys bear a sting within them, and generally prove only Dead Sea fruit, forcing one to ask himself the question, "Is life worth living?" when an inward monitor makes answer, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit."

Over a year had passed since my management commenced. The station had prospered and the stock had increased; time had not passed heavily for me, for my two companions were most agreeable.

E—— told me his father's parish was situated in D——shire, and that he, on coming of age, would be heir to £8,000. His age then was nineteen, so he had still two years to wait for his money. During that time he hoped, by strict attention to pastoral pursuits, to gain sufficient knowledge of them to enable him to make a safe investment. The past year had taught him, by dint of constant practice, to ride fairly well; in fact, he was fast becoming a fine manly Australian bushman.

On a day never to be forgotten by me, a muster of some wild cattle was to take place. They frequented some very thick and scrubby pine country. E—— begged hard to accompany the stockmen. I did not for some time comply with his request, knowing how dangerous these scrubs are to any but a most practised rider. In them, all the larger trees have dead branches protruding from their trunks, about six feet from the ground. These are as sharp as spears at the point, and quite as penetrating. An unpractised horseman in full gallop through a scrub such as I have described, is in imminent danger of being impaled or blinded by them. Warning E—— of this, I at last gave him permission to go.

My memory recalls his appearance on that morning, when, mounting his horse, his merry, handsome face beaming with health and pleasure, he rode from the stock-yard, proud of his last achievement—the complete mastery of his stock-whip. This, by incessant practice, he could at length use in the most approved manner with either his right or left hand, no longer endangering the onlookers' legs or his own neck as he cracked it. Many a time in his early efforts had the long lash wound itself round either his neck or body; but now he boasted he could flick a fly from off a bullock's hide. The truth of this assertion I doubt, however. I never saw the feat performed by him, although I have by others.

Some repairs to the stock-yard being necessary, I did not accompany the stockmen, but remained at home to supervise the carpenter. After lunch, while smoking on the verandah, whence I had an extended view over the undulating plain around the homestead, my attention was drawn to a horseman some two miles distant. The horse appeared to be galloping wildly in the direction of the stock-yard. With my field-glasses I made out the rider to be E——. He looked as if he were intoxicated, for he was holding the pommel of his saddle with both hands. A depression in the plain into which the horse had gone momentarily hid both it and the rider from me. Again the horse came in sight, but without its rider. Supposing that E—— had been thrown, I mounted my horse, which was fortunately saddled in the stable, and hastened to the spot. E——'s horse passed me in his wild flight, and I saw that he was covered with blood.

On reaching the hollow, I found poor E—— stretched on his back, lifeless, his clothes saturated with blood. I immediately returned to the homestead for the spring-cart, into which I and the ration-carrier lifted the body. The face was pale as marble, but not the slightest appearance of a wound or broken bone could I discover as I examined him sitting in the cart. Until we returned to the house I was obliged to rest content. I thought he must have burst a blood-vessel. Even after he had been washed and closely looked at, the mystery of his death was not solved until evening.

When my friend and the stockmen came back, we all went to his room, feeling, as may be imagined, terribly shocked. Behind the lobe of his right ear some one observed a slight scratch, which was found to be really a puncture; so small was it that a quill could barely have entered the wound. This discovery enlightened us fully. The jugular vein had been pricked by a sharp stick, and every drop of his life's blood had escaped. No one had seen the accident happen. When last seen alive, he was disappearing round a belt of pine scrub in order to intercept some cattle which were breaking away from the herd. We supposed that, on feeling the wound and seeing the blood spout from it, he imagined his best course was to reach home as fast as his horse could carry him. The result we now knew, as we gazed on his calm, placid face, white as a marble statue, the rapture of repose resting on every feature. On the table stood a photograph of his mother, received by him only a week before. When I saw her mild eyes and happy countenance, apparently looking towards the bed, I felt crushed at the thought of the stern duty before me—of writing and causing bitter agony to that poor mother, now in her pleasant English home, all unconscious that she would see her son no more in this world, and denied even the soothing solace of weeping at his grave.

The dead in the Australian climate must soon be buried from our sight; "decay's effacing fingers" are soon at work. On the morrow I gave the carpenter directions to take up some boards from our dining-room floor, no others being then procurable on the station, and with them we made a coffin.

Away out on the plain, half a mile distant from the house, grew a magnificent specimen of Australia's most beautiful tree, the kurragung. Its wide-spreading top and bright green foliage effectually prevented the penetration of the sun's rays. There on the hottest day it was always cool. Beneath this tree I had the grave dug. The carpenter had finished his work, and poor E—— would soon vanish from our sight. Carefully we laid him in his coffin, placing on his breast his mother's picture. For him

> "The first great day of nothingness,
> The last of danger and distress,"

had arrived.

Though deeply grieved, I could not help thinking it was well for him that his earthly career was ended. Had he lived, his lot would probably have been that of most thinking men, who, taking a retrospective glance at their own lives, are obliged to exclaim, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!" Beneath the kurragung he rests quite as peacefully as those who lie in the cemetery beside his father's country church. The grave and tree are both surrounded by a strong fence.

E—— now disappears from my pages like a tale that is told. I had known him rather over a year, yet he lives in my memory unchanged and unchanging, a lost and valued friend.

During my long residence in Australia, it has been my sad duty to witness many lonely bush graves receive their occupants. In most cases the history or even the real name of the departed is unknown, the secret of their lives being buried with them. Even the rude fence erected around the spot will soon disappear:

"Their memory and their name are gone,
Alike unknowing and unknown."

In no instance do I remember a single relative of any one of the deceased being present at the obsequies. Could the history of many be written who have finished their earthly pilgrimage in the wild Australian bush, far from home and kindred, what a tale of human suffering would be unfolded. It reminds me of Longfellow's beautiful lines:

"All was ended now, the hope and the fear and the sorrow,
All the aching of heart, the restless, unsatisfied longing,
All the dull, deep pain and constant anguish of patience."

CHAPTER XIII.

A MASSACRE IN THE EARLY SIXTIES.

THE blacks in north-west Queensland had lately become very troublesome. The massacre of the Fraser family sent a thrill of horror through the whole of Australia. This was followed by that of Mr. Wills, who, with all his station hands, numbering nineteen men, women, and children, was also brutally murdered. All this determined the white settlers to take revenge. A young friend, Robert Patton, who accompanied me to Australia in 1853, and who had been my schoolfellow in Ireland, was managing an adjoining station at the time of the Wills massacre. He will prominently appear in the narration of the event which I propose to give in this chapter, and which is copied verbatim from the *Rockhampton Bulletin* of the 5th November, 1861:

PARTICULARS OF THE MURDER ON THE COMET RIVER.

We have been kindly favoured with the full details of the recent tragical occurrence at the "Nagoa," by a gentleman who has come in from Mr. Greyson's station. The information may be relied on as authentic. In our "Extraordinary" of the 26th ult., we publish the substance of a statement made by a shepherd, named Edward Kenny, who escaped from the blacks by jumping on a horse, and so reached Mr. Greyson's station in safety. He had only seen ten dead bodies, but we have now to add nine others to the list of victims, making a total of nineteen murdered, including men, women, and children. The party of settlers from the neighbouring stations who arrived on the spot the evening of the day following the massacre, had to perform the sad office of burying the dead.

DEAD.

Mr. Wills.
Mr. and Mrs. Baker.
Elizabeth Baker.
David Baker.
Iden Baker, a boy of five years old.
—— —— Baker, an infant of seven months.
Patrick Manyou.
Mrs. Manyou, and infant of three months.
Mary A. Manyou, eight years old.
Maggie Manyou, four years old.
George Ling.
James Scot.
Henry Pickering.
George Elliot.
Charles Weedon.
Edward McCormick.
Tom ——.

Mr. Wills, junior, James Baker, overseer, and son, and William Albery, were absent from the station at the time of the slaughter, having gone back with the dray for some loading left on the road. In addition to the above, engaged about the place were three shepherds. Two escaped to Greyson's, and one concealed himself till relief arrived the following day.

On the first news reaching Rainworth station, Mr. Greyson forwarded it to Mr. Jardine, police magistrate at Rockhampton, and letters were addressed to several settlers in the neighbourhood. It was in the midst of shearing, and fortunately he had a good many hands. Early in the day a small party was despatched to the scene of the slaughter. Mr. Greyson, with several other settlers, and a black boy, a native of a remote district belonging to one of the settlers, started in the afternoon, and arrived at the station of the late Mr. Wills late at night. They waited till morning, when they found ten bodies about the camp, as described by Kenny. The body of Mr. Wills was found three yards in front of his tent, with a revolver close to his right hand, one barrel of which had been discharged, and a double-barrel gun close to his left hand, both barrels loaded. Some of the women were found with their sewing in their hands; the cook was close by his fire, the children by their mothers. Immediately outside the camp, one of the bullock-drivers, who had been engaged drawing logs for the sheep-yard, was found dead by his bullocks, with his whip in his hand; the team was still yoked, and three of the bullocks strangled. Another man, who had been assisting him, was also found dead. On the morning of the murders, Baker, the overseer, and one of his sons, and another man, were sent about a mile and a half down the creek with a horse and cart, to form a station for the ewes and lambs, and the shepherd in charge of them went down to fold the sheep and to camp there for the night. Baker and son and a third man evidently made a struggle for their lives. They were putting up a tent at the time the attack was made, and they used the tent-poles in defending themselves. Their bodies were very much mutilated, one of them having his leg nearly cut off with a blow from a sharp instrument. All the shepherds were found murdered where they severally depastured their flocks, except Kenny and Pat Mahony. The latter hid himself during the night, and was met by the party of settlers in the morning.

On the following morning, about eleven o'clock, John Moore arrived at Greyson's station. He stated that about fifty or sixty blacks were in Wills' camp on the morning of the day of the massacre, but they left before dinner, apparently on the best terms with all. He said that while in the hut, which was occupied by him and the cook, he felt very hot, and therefore went outside and lay under the shade of a tree, about five yards from the hut, where he fell asleep. On awaking, he heard the noise of natives in the camp talking quick and loud. This caused him to look cautiously through the bush, and he instantly saw several black fellows. He noticed one black fellow shove a person down, but he could not distinguish whether it was a man or a woman; from the position, he believed it to be the overseer's wife. He heard a faint cry of murder, and quick and sudden blows on the head, as if done with a nullah-nullah. He concealed himself as long as he could, in which he was aided by a flock of sheep coming up at the time without a shepherd. Being among the sheep dust and fearing the blacks, he managed to creep on his hands and knees down the creek. He heard a shot like that of a revolver. At the time he woke up, he saw a horse within ten yards of him, but dare not make a rush for it, as he would be noticed by the blacks. This was the horse that Kenny eventually got on. No person in the camp ever carried arms. There were ten or twelve stand of loaded arms in the hut when the ten men were murdered. The day after Mr. Wills arrived on the station, his bullock-driver, William Albery, went out in search of his bullocks, and met about fifty blacks. About thirty surrounded him closely. They took off his hat and felt him all over, and then took some of the beads off their own heads and put them on his. Most of the shepherds were met at different times, and treated in a similar way. The blacks were always unarmed.

Mr. Wills, a few days previous to his death, when riding alone in search of timber, met a gin with her baby in her arms. She was apparently surprised on seeing him. He rode up to her and took a silk handkerchief out of his pocket, and put it round the baby. At this she appeared quite satisfied.

When the blacks first made their appearance at the camp, Mr. Wills explained to them he would not interfere with their pursuits, but he did not wish them to come near the camp. He had just returned to his tent, when he heard them in the camp. He at once went out, and made signs to them to go off—as his son expresses it, told them to "yan away"—when a gin replied, "What for yan away?" After this, they were allowed to come up unmolested.

After the sheep were secured, and some one left to look after them, the party followed the tracks of the blacks. Within five miles they found five halting-places, where they appeared to have divided their booty. Several articles and utensils were found at these places, being left behind by the blacks, who were too heavily laden. At a distance of about twenty-five miles they came on the blacks' camp, but it being night they retired for two or three miles to avoid being observed, and waited till morning.

At dawn of day they advanced to within a mile and a half of the natives, and, leaving their horses in charge of one of the men, the party proceeded on. They came in sight of the blacks by surprise, who evidently thought themselves secure. The party immediately attacked them, when they ran up a steep ridge, perfectly inaccessible to white men. They found several of the daggers, blankets, and clothing of various descriptions. One adze had been nearly straightened by beating when red-hot, apparently in attempting to convert it into a tomahawk. They found several portions of books and papers, a pocket-book, and smoothing iron; also some beautiful native weapons, three or four bundles of boomerangs, fifteen in each, bundles of spears, and other arms. These they commenced to burn, which caused the blacks, who numbered between two and three hundred, to raise a terrific yell, and throw stones. The natives then began to spread out and descend. The party, fearing they might be cut off, retired towards their horses, the natives following them. When the person in charge of the horses came in sight on horseback, the blacks retired to their fastnesses.

While the party was on watch, they heard the bark of a dog, which assured them they must be near a station which none of them were acquainted with. Fearing that the blacks were still near, and might commit further depredations, they sought out the station, and found it about a mile and a half distant.

It proved to be Mr. Orr's station. There were five men there, but the stock had not arrived. They had been there between three and four months. They were quite unaware of the blacks being camped so near them, and said they had only seen the blacks twice, one just after their arrival, and on the other occasion only a few days before, when there were between two or three hundred of them, all unarmed. This station was well provided with arms and ammunition.

On the return of the party, they came to the scene of the murder of Mr. Wills; they discovered two black fellows, evidently reconnoitring about the camp, thinking all the whites were dead. The sheep were removed to Mr. Greyson's station. Mr. Wills, junior, arrived at his station just at the time. Mr. Wills, junior, states that he recognized three black fellows whom he had seen on the way out, two at Glen and McMasters, and one at Camerons. At his father's camp, after his arrival and previous to his departure for Albania Downs, when he spoke to them, as having seen them on the road, they signified that they remembered him. It appears that the blacks were absent from other stations at the time, and there is reason to believe that they are in league with the murderers, as some of them have returned to the stations much jaded and hungry, and to all appearance as if they had come some distance in haste.

The following is a copy of a letter now on its way to Brisbane:

"*To the Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Brisbane.*

"We, the undersigned residents in the Leichhardt district, and now assembled at Rainworth, beg to represent the necessity for an immediate increase in the number of native police in this neighbourhood. We do not deem it necessary further to refer to the murder of Mr. Wills and his servants, within twenty miles of this station, on Thursday last, than to state that it was the painful duty of several of us to assist in the burial of that gentleman and eighteen others, his servants and their families.

"We have the honour to be, &c.,

"PETER McINTOSH.
"ROBERT PATTON.
"W. H. RICHARDS.
"G. CRAWFORD.
"WILLIAM THOMPSON.
"J. GREGSON.
"GEORGE N. LIVING.
"ALLEN McMASTER."

On reading and copying verbatim the account of this massacre, the time being now so distant, I find the relation anything but graphic or grammatical. I will, therefore, endeavour to supplement the narration as I had it from my friend Mr. Patton.

The country taken up on the Nagoa by Mr. Wills was new, he having lately arrived with his stock; and what is termed the camp in the *Bulletin* was the spot selected for his head station, no permanent buildings having been erected. The mistake Mr. Wills made was want of firmness in keeping the blacks at a distance, until certain that they were well disposed. From all I have heard, he was much too kind to them, and expected gratitude from a race totally devoid of that virtue. His permitting them to visit the camp only aroused their cupidity, as they must have observed in the open tents articles which they coveted. They also had sufficient cunning to see that the men, with the exception of Mr. Wills, were unarmed. As no living white man witnessed the murders, how they took place can only be surmised by one accustomed to their treacherous habits. In this locality the white man had not yet proved his superiority to the satisfaction of the black. Availing themselves of the permission they had obtained to visit the camp, they closely scanned his habits, and were quick enough to understand that, without weapons, he was no match for their nullahs. So they arranged their plans accordingly. They came to Wills' camp, knowing how easy it would be, at a moment previously fixed, to kill the entire white party at once, which was evidently what they did. The man in hiding only heard one faint cry of "Murder!" All appeared to have been killed by the nullah-nullah, so Mr. Patton said, nearly all their skulls being fractured. The work of vengeance, however unpleasant, had to be performed, and, like the soldiers at Cawnpore on beholding the slaughtered women and children, the settlers steeled themselves to execute condign punishment on the black wretches. Eventually this was effectually done. For that slaughter many a black lost the number of his mess. From my long acquaintance with Mr. Patton, who is now dead, I feel convinced that he and his party left no stone unturned to avenge their hapless fate.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NATIVE CORROBOREE.

POOR E—— had slept in his lonely grave more than a year. In the evening, as we sat on the verandah, the beautiful kurragung-tree, standing in solitary grandeur away out on the distant plain, often recalled to our minds the sleeper at its foot, keeping his memory fresh and green as that of its own foliage. His place had been filled by a new arrival, a Mr. Todd, lately from Oxford, where he had not been the recipient of high academic honours, but, what was more essential in the rough-and-tumble bush-life of a squatter, had mastered the manly art of self-defence, and could, with a few scientific taps, delivered in the most gentlemanly manner, knock into a cocked hat any swaggering bully likely to cause unpleasantness on the station.

And common enough were such gentry on far-out stations in those days. Frequently the arm of the law was too distant to be of any immediate service; therefore the squatter was obliged to be a law unto himself, and no one knew better than he how consoling was the knowledge that one of his young gentlemen wished for no better fun than an order from him of "Up, boy, and at him!" Then the indescribable pleasure of witnessing the astonished scoundrel rising to his feet after a set to, rubbing his embellished visage as he slunk away, like a dog with his tail between his legs, while the laughing countenance of the squatter's young friend beamed upon him, as, turning down his shirt-cuffs, he would inquire what he thought of the last finishing touch, delivered straight from the shoulder!

A large number of semi-civilized blacks had camped on a plain, skirted by a brigalow scrub. I gave them permission to do so on the understanding that they should in no way molest either the sheep or shepherds, and did not come near the house.

I had been aware for some time that a grand corroboree was to come off in the camp at the next full moon. I had been present at many such scenes, but this, I was told, would be something out of the way "grand," in the blacks' sense of grandeur. They had behaved themselves so well that I was determined as a recompense to give them a little pleasure.

A cow, old and lame, but very fat, grazed near their gunyas. The overseer had been requested by them to ask me for this animal, in order to make a "cabon budgeree patter" (good feed). On the morning of the great event I had given him instructions that the cow should be driven to their camp and then shot, and that they should have the carcase as a present. On his return after this transaction, he said their delight was unbounded, and that they had given him to understand they would be much pleased by our attending the ceremony. Todd had never witnessed anything of the kind, so to please him I agreed to go.

It was the winter season, at which time, strange as it may appear, the nights in these tropical latitudes are often very cold, with sharp frost. After supper (or rather late tea) we sat on the verandah. Far away on the plain we could distinctly see the numerous fires of the camp lighting up the dark brigalow in the background. The great full moon and stars shone as they can only do through a pure atmosphere such as Australia possesses. A bright wood fire burning in our sitting-room made me loath to leave it and my comfortable chair. However, as Todd appeared all anxiety to be off, we placed our revolvers in our belts and sallied forth, the sharp, frosty air obliging us to return for our coats. Our pipes were aglow, and a brisk walk over the now crisp grass soon made us forget the cold. Drawing near the festive scene, a strong but pleasant smell of roasting meat was wafted towards us on the frosty air. I took the overseer with us. As we four came in sight, a loud shout greeted our arrival, many hands being held out with the request, "Give it bacca, poor fellow me," the speakers producing at the same time an old black clay pipe, invariably empty. Such arrant beggars are they that they would have been just the same had they had a whole drum of tobacco at their disposal. Knowing the utter impossibility of satisfying them, even had we had it in our power, we met all appeals with " Bail " (no). After repeated refusals their importunity ceased.

We had now time to take a look at the camp. Many strange blacks had arrived, increasing the number to three or four hundred men, women, and children. Most of the gunyas stood well within the scrub, so a good sight of them could not be had.

About a hundred yards from the timber, the corroboree ground had been prepared; all the grass was pared off it, and not a stone or stick broke the level earth. It was oval in shape, about two hundred yards long by one hundred wide. Large heaps of dry wood had been carried near it to replenish the fires, of which there were four, one at either end, and one at each side. Across the centre a kind of brush fence, about three feet high, was erected.

It was now past nine o'clock and very cold, the hoar-frost glistening on the dry timber. I felt sorry I had left my warm room, and inquired of an old woman when the corroboree would commence. She answered, " By am by." However, we had not long to wait. About twenty old women squatted round the fires, which now blazed brightly, as dry leaves were thrown on them, lighting up all around. These withered-looking old witches, perfectly naked, had each a kangaroo-skin, tightly rolled like a drum, on her lap. They all commenced to howl or chaunt, beating time with their hands on the drums. In a moment forty young men rushed from the scrub, painted like demons, or living skeletons; every rib was traced out by a line of pipe-clay, and they had long white stripes down their arms and legs, and red and white circles round their eyes, while their hair was on end and stuck all over with eagle-hawk's down. Not a rag covered their persons, but round the waist a roll of spun opossum wool was tightly tied like a rope.

We were seated by one of the fires, some distance from where they entered the arena, and indistinctly saw something like a tail attached to each of them. At a signal from the women they stood in line one behind the other, holding their arms as far as the elbow close to their sides, while the forearm was bent up, and the hands hung loosely down in imitation of a kangaroo. All commenced jumping in a line until the centre fence was reached. Over it they leapt like kangaroos, and continued springing up to where we sat. As they turned round when close to us, we could see that the tail was the top of a grass-tree, the stem being stuck between their backbone and the rope belt. The long, flexible black head hanging down to the ground made the best imitation of a kangaroo's tail it is possible to imagine, particularly when it rose and fell at each jump.

The greatest amusement appeared to be at the centre high jump. Leaving our seats, we got close to this hurdle. Whether intentionally or not I cannot say, but on going over, one of the jumpers would sometimes get his tail entangled and pulled off. A black who stood by and witnessed this rushed in, and, picking up the tail, soundly belaboured the hinder parts of the tailless one with it. Stooping on all fours, the offender received his chastisement, which was no trifle, for the blood was drawn at every blow. All this had become very monotonous to us, and we were about to go home, when an old woman whispered to me, "Bail yan. Womanee corroboree by am by." I had heard of women's corroborees, but had never seen one. The request to remain I could not therefore refuse.

We filled our pipes and waited patiently. Shortly after, the men retired. From the scrub marched thirty young women, attired in all the simplicity of Nature's covering, naked but not ashamed. They had not painted their persons, although each had her tail fastened in a similar manner to the rope belt round her waist, and wore it in the same way as the men. Never shall I forget the overseer's look of astonishment as he beheld them. He was a Scotchman, and in his native dialect exclaimed:

"Lord keep 's! What wad Bobbie Burns or Tam O'Shanter hae gie'n tae be here the nicht? Cutty Sark wad be naething to it!"

Todd blushed up to his eyes, so he told me afterwards. Having lately come from college, he had not forgotten his classics, and remarked something about the Olympic games, etc. The girls imitated the kangaroo to perfection, and cleared the jump far more nimbly than the men. Their loud shouts of laughter when they went on all fours, like the kangaroo feeding, were deafening. One lost her tail, so she too received punishment. The chastisement, being now simulated rather than real, was good-naturedly taken. After this, they all threw away their tails and rushed back to the gunyas in high glee.

The night was well advanced as we returned homeward. I could not tutor myself to think that civilization had after all many advantages, or tended to the increase of happiness. Here these children of Nature, without a thought of the morrow, or anxiety as to the future, enjoyed themselves to the full. As to dress, no pang of jealousy could arise in their hearts; all were on an equality, the corroboree to their uneducated minds being perfectly innocent and decorous. Could this be said of all the pleasures and amusements indulged in by the society of civilized countries? I fear not.

In future chapters I will have much more to relate regarding their habits and customs, many of which I cannot mention in a book intended to be read by the general public, so I will confine myself to the less objectionable but not less curious ceremonies of this soon-to-be-extinct race.

I must not forget to mention the following incident, related to me by a friend. When out on his run on the Murray River, he visited the blacks' camp. The men were assembled in a group by themselves, apparently discussing some subject. The women, a few hundred yards distant, were likewise congregated together and jabbering loudly. A young woman sat apart, seemingly in great distress. During the time my friend was observing them, one of the men walked up to her with a nullah, and with a heavy blow fractured her skull, killing her instantly. What had been her crime? Whether she was saint or sinner, was unknown to him. They have their own traditions and laws, which, if transgressed, make the transgressor amenable. The young woman, for all we know, may have been guilty of some offence deserving of death according to our own code. The man, after striking the blow, returned and sat down, quite composed. Over the dead body the women were making the usual lamentation. The act was so sudden, my friend said, that he could do nothing to prevent the murder or execution. He afterwards remonstrated with the executioner, who understood a little English. He merely replied, "No good womanee."

CHAPTER XV.

A FIRE IN THE BUSH.

A HOT dry summer was upon us; for months no rain had fallen; day after day the sun, like a glowing, fiery ball, rose and set. All nature appeared doomed to death. Had not the nights, owing to their cooler temperature, permitted a slight reaction, human nature, like many of the animal creation, must have succumbed. During the day the slightest exertion drenched in perspiration the lightest clothing it was possible to wear, and oh, how gladly did we see the sun gradually disappear in a fiery haze behind the hills!

As evening closed, bringing a slight diminution in this sweltering heat, we placed our chairs in front of the house, threw ourselves into them in various attitudes, and prepared for the first comfortable smoke of the day. From a small steaming swamp situated near the house around a spring, came the booming tones of the bull-frog. We construed these sounds into "Hot, hot, too hot!" as if even the frogs were unhappy. The continual reiteration of this "Hot, hot, too hot!" growing monotonous, I told Todd to fire a charge of shot in the direction of the spring. As the leaden pellets pattered in the mud, the mocking tones ceased, only to commence with fresh vigour a few minutes after. In the distant brigalow scrub the mopoke owl sat and hooted; bats, attracted by the table lamp, flew in numbers in and out of the house; while the far-off howling of dingoes prowling after their prey, added to the many uncouth and mournful sounds of the night, tending in no small degree to depress our worn-out nerves. We retired to bed, but only restless sleep could be anticipated, and we had the assurance that the morrow would usher in no change.

Towards morning, Todd came to my bed-room, bearing the unpleasant intelligence that a large bush fire must be raging in the ranges many miles away. From the window I could see a reflection in the sky like that of the rising sun. In those days these fires were not so dreaded, and they did not create so much uneasiness as they do now, since the advent of fences. A few thousand acres of grass consumed was of little consequence so long as the homestead and horse-paddock fence remained untouched. However, in such a season as that of which I am speaking, with grass as dry as tinder, a bush fire, if not checked in its career, might sweep off every blade of pasturage on the entire station, and so endanger the lives of both sheep and shepherds. At daybreak, a tall white pillar of a smoke-cloud rose hundreds of feet into the clear atmosphere, there spreading over the locality of the fire, and producing an appearance as if a heavy thunder-storm were brewing.

I sent the overseer after breakfast to the ranges to ascertain if a shepherd and a flock of sheep were likely to be in danger, as the hut and feeding-ground were close to them. He returned at midday, saying the hut and yards were perfectly safe, as no grass grew near them; but he had instructed the shepherd to feed his flock towards the homestead, fearing that, should a change of wind occur, the fire would sweep down on the plain and overtake them. He was instructed to lose no time by the way, and dog the sheep along as rapidly as he could. No danger was anticipated if the wind continued in the right quarter. While the overseer was speaking to me, the door of his hut closed with a bang. This was caused by a change of wind, which was now blowing directly from the burning ranges towards the homestead.

"By jingo!" cried he, "we must be off, or the shepherd will be caught."

No time can be lost in an emergency like this. The overseer's horse, still unsaddled, stood at the door. On it he jumped, and galloped to the horse-paddock and yarded some horses. To my friend and Todd I said: "Roll up a few empty flour-bags and strap them on your saddles." These were for beating out the flames, no green boughs being handy for that purpose in the open country. The ration-carrier had orders to get the spring-cart ready, and to place in it some provisions and a keg of water, after which he was to follow us.

My friend, Todd, and I quickly saddled our horses and galloped off in the direction of the fire. We met the shepherd and his flock on his way to the homestead. I told him to make all haste.

The air, being now filled with smoke, was suffocating, and blew directly in our faces. Clouds of grasshoppers flew past, kangaroo rats bounded bewildered from tussock to tussock, while above soared hawks and crows, on the look-out for roasted grasshoppers, snakes, or anything they could pick up. They were continually alighting on the blackened ground behind the line of fire, feasting to their heart's content.

We soon discovered that our efforts to extinguish the flames must prove unavailing, for the line of blaze extended for miles on either side; in fact, so rapidly was it advancing, assisted by the high wind, that it would overtake the shepherd and his flock long before he could reach a place of safety. Riding back to him, we helped to hurry the sheep along, but, sheep-like, they opposed us in every possible manner by ringing, that is, turning round and round in a circle, and endeavouring to camp every minute. We now heard the roar of the coming fire. One resource, and one only, now remained to save the sheep, and this was to fire the grass in front of where we stood, and then hurry them on to the burnt space, so as to stay the approaching flames when they arrived. This, our last chance, I disliked to put in practice, as it would only advance the fire towards the homestead.

Our thirst had become intolerable; the cart containing the water had not arrived. None but those in a similar situation can realize the absolute luxury of a draught of cold water at such times. What with the broiling sun's rays, the heat of the fire, with its horrid, acrid smoke, and the intense excitement caused by the squatter's knowledge that it is on the exertions of himself and his men that the salvation of his home, if not the lives of many of his stock, depends—one's thirst is terrible. No Dives could be in a worse plight, or long more vehemently with his whole heart and soul for a drop of water to cool his tongue. I have known strong men fall fainting to the ground, unable to move or crawl away, and, if not rescued by a more fortunate associate, perish in the flames. Australian bush records contain many such cases of miserable deaths.

Fortunately for us, the wind fell to some extent; the swirling clouds of smoke were not so blinding, and we had time for a hurried consultation as to our best course of action. To light the grass and trust to a change of wind before the flames could reach the head station, was the advice of the overseer.

"If ye dinna, Auld Nick 'll hae the blessed flock in a jiffey!" he said.

Under the circumstances, it was the only thing to do. He and I galloped forward a few hundred yards to where a dray track crossed the plain. Little or no grass grew on the side nearest the homestead, Away went the flames, leaping skyward towards our home, still five miles distant. We all busied ourselves beating out with the empty flour-bags any fire making its way over the track, and, favoured by the wind, we succeeded in doing this.

We were now between two fires. In our haste, we had completely forgotten the cart containing the longed-for water, which must now be close at hand. Our efforts to save the sheep had risked its safety. We could only hope the driver would use all speed with his horse to reach the burnt ground. While we were speaking the cart came in sight, the man whipping the animal to a gallop. Being now assured of its safety, and so thankful for its arrival, we made a dash for the keg, smoke-begrimed and blear-eyed, our parched tongues clinging to the roofs of our mouths. And oh, what a delicious draught we had! Refreshed, we now hurried back to the shepherd, whom we found utterly exhausted, stretched on the ground, careless what might happen either to himself or his charge. The sheep stood stupidly round in several mobs.

He was revived by a draught of water from a flask, and with our assistance he drove most of the sheep to a place of safety. Some, however, refused to move until the roaring fire swooped down on them and sealed their fate. The flames literally melted their wool to a blackened, bubbling cinder, their miserable bleatings being at last silenced in an agonizing and lingering death. Only a few moments after getting the others into safety, the fire, with forked tongues darting upwards ready to devour us all, reached the burnt space. There, making one frantic effort to leap across, the flames died in the attempt. When the blinding, suffocating smoke cleared off behind us, a sorry-looking party we looked, but we were thankful that the shepherd and most of the sheep were saved.

Far over the plain, in the direction of our house, advanced the fire we had lighted. Should no change in the wind take place, it would be there in less than an hour. Taking a hasty pull at the water-keg, we rode on at full speed until, overtaking our enemy, we rushed our horses, with closed eyes and mouths, through the burning line on to the unburnt grass, which for another two miles stood crisp and dry, ready to be devoured. A slight lull in the wind, now perceptible, indicated a change. Suddenly it dropped to a calm; then round it came, blowing fiercely from the opposite quarter. The devouring element was now in our power.

Dismounting from our horses, we beat out the brightest burning places with our bags. This we continued to do till long after midnight, keeping watch that the fire did not break out afresh.

Had we not fired the grass ahead, nothing on earth could have saved either sheep or shepherd, for, having no horse, he would have been overtaken by the flames and burnt to death.

Towards morning we reached home, more dead than alive. Our poor horses were almost unable to stand from fatigue and want of water. Passing the spring near the house, we let them drink their fill, when in all directions from its sedgy margin came the sounds of " Hot, hot, too hot ! " from the frogs. " Yes," thought we, " Hot, hot, too d—— hot ! "

CHAPTER XVI.

A SEASON OF FLOOD.

In tropical Queensland it seldom rains in moderation, a dry season or a series of such seasons being generally followed by one of incessant downpour for months together, the sun appearing only momentarily through the dense leaden rain-cloud which hangs like a pall over the face of nature. Now and again the steady falling, soaking rain, as if exhausted, ceases. Then through the rift in the clouds the distant hill-tops appear for a moment, like ghosts clad in winding-sheets of mist, to disappear again as suddenly when the rift closes in. The heavy moisture-laden atmosphere does not rise and vanish like the morning mists; slowly descending, it meets the vapour rising from the steaming earth, and then the rain with renewed vigour falls in perfect sheets of water, as if the flood-gates of the heavens were opened, never again to close until a second deluge had swept all before it. The rain gives new life to the numerous small water conduits. Their waters rush in gurgling streams to mingle with the distant river, which, still confined within its banks, sweeps along sullenly with its curling eddies, bearing on its surface trees and logs, with an occasional dead sheep or bullock, appearing as if endowed with the consciousness that the time is near at hand when its steadily rising waters will rise triumphant over all obstacles, engulfing the level plains and the low country in a sea of mud and water, and leaving only the higher ridges, like islands, unsubmerged.

On one of these slight eminences stood our home. Within, all was damp, sodden, and comfortless. For many days the walls had been trickling with condensed moisture, and showed a growth of mildew. All leather articles, such as saddlery, boots, etc., were covered with it. In the station store the bags containing sugar or salt dripped molasses or brine, as the case might be. But the squatter stoically submits to the inevitable when many less self-sustained than he might, from an accumulation of evils (not that he terms his personal discomfort as such), be tempted to end them by a plunge towards death. By experience he knows full well that every cloud has a silver lining, and consoles himself with the words of some Solon—I forget which:

"Beware of desperate steps; the darkest day,
Live till to-morrow, will have passed away."

What he most dreads is the suffering and certain loss of many of his stock. His sheep will suffer from foot-rot for months after, and many of his shepherds will be unable to have their usual ration of flour, tea, and sugar taken to them. They will be obliged to sustain life on mutton alone. In newlyoccupied country a wet season causes the ground to become so boggy in places that a horse cannot be ridden; he will sink to his middle, if not deeper, plunging and straining to release himself. In this, if he is strong, he generally succeeds, but his rider is compelled to dismount immediately.

I have said that our home stood on a slight elevation. From morning till night the rain descended without intermission. The river in many places was rising over its banks, making a higher flood than had yet been known a certainty. The continual croaking of the green tree frog resounded from all quarters. Suddenly beneath your chair came his "Croak, croak," ending with "Cher, cher up." Immediately afterwards, from some lodgment overhead in the roof, came the answer, returned in similar tones. Then the concert would be joined by others, but where they were hidden it was impossible even to guess. The tree frog is not repulsive to the eye, like the bloated brown species in the swamp. Indeed, he is handsome as a frog can be, with his vivid green colouring and his clear, beautiful eye surrounded by a brilliant golden circle. Nor are his exclamations so depressing. The "Cher, cher up," at its conclusion may well be interpreted as "Cheer up!" and that is better than "Hot, too hot!"

The incessant patter of the falling rain appeared to create much enjoyment for them, but we, poor mortals, not being amphibious, could only anticipate death and disaster. When day dawned, far as the eye could reach, the plain lay covered several feet deep. The kurragung-tree, marking the site of E——'s grave, lifted its head high above the inundation, but the fence had disappeared from view. The water still continued to rise. As the current swept by our island, many dead sheep were borne along with it, while on pieces of floating bark, sticks, etc., ants, centipedes, scorpions, and an occasional snake, went by. Many of these unwelcome visitors landed on our island, to our no small disgust. We knew that the horses in the paddock were most likely safe, for a small hill stood in the centre, and to this they were certain to make as the water rose.

I never remember passing a more miserable day in my life, for I knew that many sheep must have perished. The bodies that floated by were from a flock which fed four miles up the river, in charge of a German shepherd. The overseer had instructed him under no account whatever to feed his sheep on low country near the river while the rain continued. These instructions he had doubtless disobeyed. Until the flood abated, no tidings of his fate or of the sheep in his charge could be obtained, and no cessation in the rain had yet taken place, while the river still continued to rise. For three days this horrible state of anxiety lasted; better, far better, for me to know the worst. At length the welcome intelligence was brought me by Todd that the flood was falling fast. Before night the river had receded within its banks, though as it continued to roll along, its colour was that of pea-soup.

On the morning of the fourth day, Todd, an experienced and powerful swimmer, requested permission to cross at a narrow part three miles further up, and nearly opposite the shepherd's hut. He was confident he could accomplish this feat. My friend and I accompanied him, taking a strong but light rope with us. By wading knee-deep through the mud, and stumbling into holes and over logs, the place was reached with difficulty.

On the opposite bank stood a large gum-tree. High on a limb we could see something which looked as if it were the body of a dead sheep or some flood *débris*. The river being too wide for a nearer inspection, we troubled no further with respect to it, and proceeded a few hundred yards up the stream to a bend in the river, where the current was thrown over to the opposite side. Here Todd proposed to make the attempt, so he stripped, and with the rope rolled round his waist, entered the water.

For some time he made no headway in crossing, and was rapidly swept down the stream. At length he was caught by the current, which carried him, with little exertion on his part, right across. He landed close to the gum-tree, where a gibbering as if from a monkey met his astonished ears. Whence the noise proceeded puzzled him. He fancied it came from the supposed dead sheep in the tree high over his head, but he soon discovered this to be the shepherd himself. Todd endeavoured to make him understand that relief was at hand, but no sign of recognition did the shepherd make. As the sound continued, Todd climbed up to him with great difficulty, and found he had tightly buckled his leather belt round a dead limb, and also round his own middle. Thus securely fastened, he could not fall. I will describe in Todd's words the horrible object the man presented:

> When I got close to his feet, which hung down near to my face, they were without socks or boots. Countless numbers of ants swarmed over them, eating every particle of flesh from the bones; the toes had been cleansed completely, while the more fleshy parts were fast getting into a like state. I managed to get a little higher up the tree, near where his head hung down. The belt he had fastened round his waist supported the body in the middle, so that his hands and face were only slightly above his feet. I found his hands covered with ants, and much in the same state as his feet. The face I could not see, as it hung on his breast. I endeavoured to lift it, when—oh, God! What I then saw I can't relate! The gibbering noise never ceased, and the jaws snapped like a dog's. Round his body I fastened the rope, taking one turn round the branch. With difficulty I unbuckled the belt, and as gently as was in my power I lowered him to the ground.

Such was Todd's sad description. What followed my friend and I witnessed from the opposite bank. No sooner had the body reached the ground than it commenced to roll over and over until the river bank was reached. Another roll, and in it went; the rushing water closing over, and it disappeared from our sight. Todd went to the man's hut. His dog was there half-starved, but not a single sheep had returned; all had been drowned. The flock numbered 1,200. Gradually, as the water subsided, all the other sheep on the station were counted, when I found the total loss to be over 3,000. However, the following season being an unusually good one, the loss was soon forgotten; so that, after all, a wet season did not prove the unmitigated evil I had anticipated. Grass growing luxuriantly, the lambing was all that I could wish. The shepherd's miserable fate had been caused by his not obeying the overseer's orders; had he used a particle of common-sense and kept to the higher ground, he would have run no risk. He had told the overseer he disliked the sharp stony ridges, as they were destructive to his boots. So to save these he lost his life.

Six months after this, Todd and I were riding through a thick scrub of river oaks growing close to the river's bank. Their slanting trunks and broken branches were a certain indication that the late flood had swept over their yielding tops. Here too, high as our horses' heads, from the bent and slender branch of an oak no thicker than a whipstick, a grinning skeleton, or rather a portion of one, dangled from a rope, the trunk held together by some rags of clothing and the rope about its middle, while beneath lay the bones of hands and feet. To us the mystery required no explanation. A second time Todd lowered it to the ground. This time no horrible gibbering struck the ear, for the mouth was gaping wide and rigid, never to snap in agony again. Next day the bones were consigned to Mother Earth, near the spot where we discovered them. We gave it the name of the "German's grave," which it will doubtless bear many a long year after the poor German and his tragic fate are forgotten. Such too often is life and death in the far Australian bush.

Not many months before the German's death, Todd and I were riding over the run. From a clump of pine-trees near a water-hole rose an eagle-hawk, a certain sign that carrion of some kind was there. We went over to the spot to see what it was, and—it was as if I were fated to witness harrowing bush fatalities—there lay a man, dead for some days. His face had been pecked away beyond all recognition, but how he had met his death was plain enough. Across his thighs had lain a heavy pine-tree, but nothing of this remained save some broken dead branches; all else was consumed by fire. Only a white line of ash was left, and in it, close to the body, lay some calcined leg-bones. A pair of old worn boots were near. Sticking from them were the shin-bones, their ends charred. The body lay in a hollow, evidently scraped by his hands in his frantic efforts to free himself. Poor fellow! How unavailing were his struggles!

How all this had happened could be easily imagined. The man—one of the wandering shearing class—had camped at the water-hole for the night, and foolishly lighted his fire at the foot of a standing but dead pine-tree, not knowing its inflammability when dead. After boiling his tea, he had spread his blanket and fallen asleep a short distance off without extinguishing the fire. This slowly but surely burnt the tree, until it fell right across the man's legs, breaking them or pinning them as he lay. Can any one imagine the horror of his position? As yet the fire itself was not near him; perhaps a day or more might elapse before it could reach him. Over the scene a veil must be drawn. Let us hope death had relieved him from his sufferings before the fiery furnace lent its aid. We examined the pockets and "swag," but from them could gain no clue to his name. They contained only an old comb, a razor, some tea, flour, and sugar—that was all. At the foot of a pine we buried the remains, giving a new name to the water-hole—that of "Dead man's hole."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SHEARER OF THE PAST.

SHEARING-TIME, that busy season, was near at hand. The men's hut at the wool-shed had been put in order, and a man-cook hired to preside in it. Shearers—or men so calling themselves—daily arrived. They were very unlike those of the present day. The shearer of thirty or more years ago was generally an unmitigated blackguard. Having no home, and fearing neither God nor devil, he roamed the country, bearing on his back his "swag," as he termed his roll of dirty, threadbare blankets, and carrying in his hand a quart pot, or tin billy-can, black and filthy like himself, to boil either meat or tea as the case might be. His chief joy in life, and one to which he looked forward with intense longing, was the last day of shearing, when his tally of sheep shorn would be added up, and a cheque received by him for the amount. Then, as if the cheque burnt into his pocket like a firebrand, he would hie to the nearest grog shanty, where, in a brutal state of intoxication, he might be seen for weeks or days, more like a hog than a human being, swilling the fiery, poisonous stuff called "real" Jamaica rum, until, unable to sit or stand, the shanty-keeper carried or dragged him to the "dead-house"—a shed so named, built near the shanty—and there, on a bunk or on the ground, he slept the sleep of stupefaction.

After a longer or shorter period his bleared eyes would open in his aching head, and, endeavouring to collect his muddled thoughts as to his whereabouts, he would make many unsuccessful attempts to regain his feet. Then, either staggering or crawling on all fours, he would make for the bar, where a fresh supply of poison would be handed to him and gulped down at one draught. This orgie would be repeated for days, according as the amount of his cheque or the rapacity of the shanty-keeper permitted. The next thing was to inform him that all his money was spent. If not now in *delirium tremens*, he was fast approaching it, so he was given his marching orders, time being graciously allowed him to roll up his blanket. If he did not then decamp, he would be kicked from off the premises, his nerves being now in such a state that he could not resist this peremptory order, given, as it was, by a bloated scoundrel worse than himself, but who, more cautious, took care to imbibe his own liquor without the addition of blue-stone or tobacco which he placed in it for his dupes. Staggering and feeble, he would slink away, and dropping under some tree by the wayside, fall asleep. Well for him if, on awaking, nothing stronger than the water contained in the next muddy hole was within his reach. A long draught from it would cool his burning thirst; then afterwards, perhaps, a more refreshing sleep than had been his for days would overtake him. Feeling better by degrees, he would then shoulder his swag, content to wander, a loafing outcast, from shepherd's hut to shepherd's hut, begging the food he would not work to obtain. Such was the life of the majority of shearers in the olden time.

How often have I met on some bush track such wretches as I have endeavoured to describe. Their bones rest at the bottom of many an Australian river, or their bleached skeleton forms whiten for a time the interior of some scrub. They had no personal friends, further than the boon companions of their orgies, so their disappearance from the earth was unknown and uncared for.

Such were many of the new arrivals at the men's hut. For the first few days they were miserable-looking and cringing to a degree from semi-starvation; but after a few hearty meals, substantially composed of beef, mutton, tea, and damper, their innate rowdyism rose triumphant, turning the shearers' hut into a veritable pandemonium of blackguardism.

One morning, the cook came to me complaining that his situation had become unbearable from the intolerable insolence of a man named Kelly. If he were not dismissed by me, the cook said, he himself must resign. This Kelly, a big, powerful Irishman, professed to be a crack shearer. His appearance justified what he said. In height and breadth of chest he was almost gigantic, although his hands trembled from dissipation, while a peculiar twitching of the mouth indicated that he had lately been to some shanty, and that the effect of the poison he had there consumed still remained in his system. I was anxious to learn from the cook what he considered insolence on Kelly's part. He replied that he had called him a "black devil," and had, with a large sheath-knife in his hand, seized him, threatening to cut off his ears and tail. Finding the latter appendage absent, he let him go, saying that some one had been there before and docked him.

I had no doubt that Kelly was suffering from symptoms of approaching *delirium tremens*, and desired the cook to return to the hut, and take no notice of him whatever. After dinner, we heard some shouting proceeding from the shearers' hut, and presently out rushed Kelly, stripped to the skin. He ran madly up to where we were standing; his eyes looked like balls of fire, while he held in his hand a butcher's knife, shouting at the top of his voice: "The blacks! the blacks! Don't you see them, with their spears, boomerangs, and tomahawks? Look! look! there are hundreds of them!" Then at full speed he ran in the direction of the river. Todd was after him like a shot, and caught him close to the river bank, where a fearful struggle took place between them. Todd's science could not be put into practice. Before I got to them both were on the ground, locked in a vice-like embrace. The now furious madman still had the knife in his hand, the wrist of which Todd grasped. With a heavy stick I struck Kelly's arm, and the knife dropped from his grasp.

Springing to his feet, he shook himself free from Todd; he appeared not to see me, and continued his flight to the river. Todd was again after him, but did not succeed in overtaking him before he sprang from a high bank into a deep pool at its foot, and sank like a stone. Todd dived after him, and brought him to the surface, landing the giant on a sand-bank, where, like a Hercules, he lay panting, but docile as a child. The demon of poisoned drink had departed from him, and—partly like the man mentioned in Scripture—he was, if not clothed, at any rate in his right mind. The immersion appeared to have sobered him completely. On our way back to the hut, he talked rationally and well, proving from his apt observations on life and its vicissitudes, that he was a man of education who had evidently had a history. This he afterwards related, being grateful to Todd and me for the interest we took in him. For the present I will leave him at the men's hut.

In the station's store I had a large supply of station requisites. The building was by no means a secure one, and stood in danger of being robbed. Therefore Todd had a bed in it at night. This was unknown to the men at the hut, as he did not retire until long after dark, and returned to his own room in the house before daylight. One night he fancied some one was endeavouring to prise out one of the wooden slabs forming the walls of the store. He rose, placing himself close to the spot whence the sounds proceeded. Slowly a slab was lifted out of its groove, and through the aperture a man quietly stepped. Todd seized him by the neck in a moment, when a scuffle ensued, which upset many things. There was a crash as if a glass bottle had fallen and broken close to the wrestlers. A yell from some one who seemed to be suffering the greatest torture brought myself and my friend to Todd's assistance. We struck a light, and found both on the floor, Todd uppermost. Shriek after shriek came from the thief, while the strong smell of butter of antimony (a fluid which burns like *aqua fortis*, and is used for foot-rotting sheep) pervaded everything.

"For God's sake, let me up!" cried the man; "my skin is on fire."

A closer inspection revealed the facts. In a pool of burning liquid lay the man's leg, while all around were the shattered fragments of a large glass jar that had stood on a shelf under which Todd and his antagonist were. We seized the man, who writhed in agony, and requested us to cut his clothes off. This we did, and found much of his skin adhering to them. How Todd escaped was a mystery, his hand being only slightly burnt.

The would-be thief proved to be one of the shearers from the hut. He suffered for many a long day, and ever afterwards he walked very lame from contraction of some muscles in his leg. He said it would be a lesson he would never forget. I did not think it likely he would, his injured limb being quite sufficient to refresh his memory.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OBSTREPEROUS SHEARERS.

SHEARING had progressed but indifferently. Frequent showers wetted the sheep and caused many breaks, giving the shearers much idle time. The truth of Dr. Watts' saying regarding the influence of Satan upon idle hands was now exemplified. He, or one of his emissaries, had certainly stepped into my shearers' hut, and there, unbidden by me, taken up his residence. Over his willing and obedient subjects he reigned supreme, instigating all to revolt against every authority but his own. The half-starved, dirty rascals under his sway had not become a whit more cleanly in their persons, but good wholesome food had so strengthened their bodily frames that they waxed fat, and kicked to such an extent that a summary check must be enforced, or else anarchy would prevail. They grumbled at food, the weather, sheep, shears, shed, and everything in heaven above or on the earth beneath. They blasphemed the cook with a most robust blasphemy. One morning, he complained to me that they had refused to eat any *cold* cooked meat. All such, they told him, must for the future be thrown on the refuse heap. At the same time they admonished him that he would certainly follow it to that receptacle if he dared insult "gentlemen" by placing cold tack, as they termed it, before them a second time.

When I asked the cook for the ringleader's name, he refused to give it, saying to do so was more than his life was worth. One man I suspected, named "Duffy." From his accent he was Irish. He was powerful in build, and had a neck like a bull, crowned with a round bullet head. On his arrival this had seemed to justify the suspicion that prison shears had passed over it not long before.

A few days after the cook had lodged his complaint, Todd and I were near the men's hut, when out walked Duffy, bearing in his hand a fine leg of mutton, cooked, cold, but uncut. This he threw on the refuse heap. Todd picked it up and brought it to me. It was as I have described. We were now certain of our man. Going to the hut door, I called Duffy. No answer came for some time. At length he appeared at the door, politely inquiring, "What the devil I wanted with him?" Having the leg of mutton in my hand, I requested to know why he threw it out? With a few choice adjectives, he said it was his intention to dispose of all cold meat in like manner. I told him to come up to the office to be paid off, and then to leave the station immediately. To this he replied, "He was d——d if he would."

"If you don't, you will go without your money," I heard Todd say, and before I could prevent him he rushed at Duffy, who, thinking brute force was everything, made a grimace. Todd's fist altered the grimace considerably. The ruffian then backed into the hut and shut the door. From within we could hear the men loudly talking, telling Duffy to go out and "smash that cheeky English pup."

I asked Todd if he thought he could walk into him, and give him a thorough thrashing.

"Just wait till I have finished with him; then give me your opinion," he replied.

Out came Duffy, accompanied by his friends the shearers. I was glad to see that Kelly and some others kept in the background. An open space near the hut was chosen for the set-to. Both combatants stripped. Todd, fully two stone lighter than Duffy, was all muscle; Duffy, a most powerful man, was flabby with dissipation. His appearance when undressed gave me no uneasiness as to who would prove victorious.

The first and only round astonished the men, and Todd, without a scratch, stood over his prostrate foe, laughingly asking him, "What he thought of the English pup now?" Then, turning to the mob of bystanders, he requested in mocking tones to be told if any of them felt any inclination to be laid alongside their champion. If so, he was quite ready to render them assistance. Holding out his hand to Duffy, he offered to raise the scoundrel, but he still lay prone, and seemed stupefied, as if not exactly knowing how he came to his present position.

One by one the men returned to the hut, using language which, if not polite, was certainly forcible. Their hero was left by them to recover his feet as best he could. A hero no longer, with swollen and bruised visage he accompanied us to the office, where his cheque was handed to him, with strict injunctions to clear out immediately. This, I suppose, he did that evening, for I never saw him again.

After this mill, Todd was known by the station hands as "the English bull pup," but it was astonishing to see how cautiously any of them used the appellation in his presence. Not that he really cared a pin, but discretion on their part was necessary, lest the pup might be tempted, just in his playfulness, to bite rather hard.

All trouble with the men was over for that season. They had profited by the lesson administered, and behaved themselves accordingly.

I was determined to employ Kelly, the best shearer and most quietly-conducted man in the shed, on the station, if it suited him, when shearing was over. He had kept aloof as much as he possibly could from the others, seldom speaking to any one, and if addressed by Todd or me, answering us in the language of a gentleman. That he was not of the common herd, we felt certain, but he resented all attempts to learn his history or even his real name. I had noticed that, when stooping over his sheep when he was shearing, he invariably wore a stout piece of whipcord round his neck; to this was attached a small leather packet or case, in size a few inches square. The day on which he rushed madly from the hut it was absent, but where it was I know not—perhaps in his mania he had left it in his swag.

Shearing would finish the next day, so I spoke to Kelly with regard to his remaining to assist in the erection of a new stock-yard I contemplated building. He gladly agreed to my terms.

As the yard he was working at was close to the homestead, we all went there frequently. We found Kelly, by his conversation, to be not only a gentleman in his manners, but a remarkably well educated man. Todd one day jokingly made use of some Latin quotation, to which Kelly replied in the same language, but slightly correcting Todd, who, on his return to the house, looked up his Horace, and found Kelly right. From that day a fellow-feeling sprang up between the two, and gained strength as time went on.

The yard was near completion when one day some of the men working there came hurriedly to the house, bearing the intelligence that Kelly had got hurt in the ribs while felling a tree. We were soon on the spot, and found that he, with a mate, had been cross-cutting a large gum-tree. When nearly cut through, it had suddenly slipped from the butt, striking Kelly right in the chest in its fall. He was perfectly sensible when we arrived, but appeared to be suffering great pain. That some of his ribs—if not his breast-bone—were fractured, was certain. We had him carefully carried to the house, Todd giving up his room and bed for his comfort.

When he lay at full length I examined him, and felt that many ribs were broken. I also feared his lung had been punctured by one of them. I wished to take off the string with the case attached to it, but in a feeble voice he requested that it might remain. However, on Todd assuring him that its secrets would be carefully preserved, he allowed him to remove it.

To send for medical advice was out of the question, as no doctor resided within a hundred miles. We carefully bound and tended him for more than a week, and he appeared to be rallying. Then a cough set in, accompanied by blood-spitting, showing injury to the lungs. This was what I had feared. Gradually he lost strength every day, becoming emaciated almost to a skeleton. There was now no hope of his recovery, and he knew it; he even seemed pleased that the end was near. On the day he died, Todd, sitting by his bedside, inquired if he could be of service to him in any way by notifying his friends in the old country.

"My friends!" said he, with a sigh. "You and the master are all I have now." And, asking for the packet, he requested Todd to open it. With some little trouble he ripped open the leather covering. Within was a daguerrotype likeness of a lady with a little girl on her knee. The lady's face was mild and handsome, the child was pleasing, but no more; both were stylishly dressed. Kelly asked to look at them. His eyes filled with tears as he did so; then in a few words he related his history.

"My name is not Kelly," he said. "My real name must be buried with me. I am the son of a gentleman in the south of Ireland, and I am an M.A. of Trinity College, Dublin. The lady was my wife, and the girl my daughter. At college the craving for drink grew upon me. Do what I could, make all the resolutions it is in a mortal's power to make—all was fruitless. I married my cousin, and for a time got the upper hand of my temptation. When my little daughter was born, I again fell. My poor wife did her utmost to wean me from the accursed habit. Sometimes she was successful for months. At this time we lived in a pretty cottage in the country. One night I returned from the neighbouring town drunk, but, not wishing to disturb my wife, I threw myself on a couch in the sitting-room. By some means I overturned a lighted candle. In a moment the window-curtains were in a blaze. In my drunken stupidity I staggered from the house and fell on the lawn. Everything else was a blank to me, until the hurrying footsteps of people endeavouring to quench the flames awoke me."

Here Kelly gasped for breath; we thought all was over. Presently he recovered somewhat, and then continued:

"Both my wife and daughter perished, but I—worthless wretch!—still lived. The curse of hereditary drunkenness is upon me. My father and grandfather both died drunk, and so would I, had I the opportunity. I am the last of my name; perhaps it is as well. The few pounds owing to me I was hoarding for the accursed shanty-keeper, looking forward to the time when his liquid poison should deaden the hell of my mind. Send the money to the nearest hospital; to me it is useless now."

Then with a last long-drawn sigh he died. He rests under the kurragung-tree, by the side of E——, with the packet in his coffin.

How he came to Australia he did not tell us, for death cut short his sad story. How many like him have I known! They lie far from friends and kindred, in nameless graves. In this fair land the demon of drink still slaughters its thousands and tens of thousands. When will the day arrive spoken of by the philosopher ?—

> "Were all men only good and wise,
>   And willed but to do well,
> This earth were then a Paradise,
>   As now 'tis most a hell."

Years have wrought a wonderful change in the Australian shearer. He of the present day spends little of his money with the shanty-keeper, but his impudence and aggressiveness have in no way abated. These qualities frequently require a call to order, and there is still much of the larrikin in him. Unlike his predecessor, his more sober habits enable him to go in for horse-racing; flash balls at the township are his delight; occasionally he is the owner of one or two good horses, whose wonderful speed and other qualities he endeavours to impress upon you by the use of sanguinary if not foul language. His literary tastes are limited to some second-rate Sunday paper or the questionable trash contained in some yellow-backed novel. Books upon any scientific subject he holds in the greatest contempt. With all his faults he not infrequently marries and settles down to farming and raising children perhaps a degree less flash than himself. Evolution may in time work wonders with his progeny, but the present generation will not live to see the result.

CHAPTER XIX.

SOME NATIVE CUSTOMS.

A FEW miles distant from the homestead many blacks were camped. Game being plentiful, we saw little of them, and they gave us no annoyance. They seldom came near the house to beg for food. One morning I had occasion to pass near their camp, and there something out of the common appeared to be taking place. Loud and angry women's voices sounded high above all the intolerable babble of many tongues all wagging at the same moment, thus making confusion worse confounded.

I got off my horse and inquired of an old woman the meaning of the row. Her explanation was embodied in the words, "Billy crammer Jackey's gin," which, in plain English, meant that Billy had stolen Jackey's wife. A woman has been the cause of many troubles, from the far-off time of Helen to the present day; and although the possession of Jackey's gin seemed unlikely to involve the nations in bloodshed, as did her fair sister's abduction in the olden time, yet as a result even of Jackey's loss, blood would have to flow, and that in tolerable profusion, from the persons of the rivals. These the old woman now pointed out to me.

Both were fine specimens of the uncivilized aborigine, their really magnificent physique being displayed to full advantage as they stood near the centre of the encampment, in their birthday costume, ready for the duel. In age neither could have been more than twenty. Their chest development and that of their arms would have been deemed extraordinary even in a European. In their lower limbs there was a slight falling off, but, taking them as they stood, two such men would have been difficult to find in any civilized race. I did not see the dark abducted one, but no doubt she was present, perhaps, like many a fair sister in other lands, inwardly proud, if not callous, before the excitement and personal suffering which the possession of her charms was creating in the hearts of men.

The fighting and duelling of the blacks has its own code of laws. These are just as stringent and are to the full as honourably observed as among the whites, who often turn up their eyes in pious and sanctimonious horror at the dreadful, not to say fiendish doings of the miserable, unenlightened heathen, who, strange to say, have nevertheless continued for ages to live and increase in numbers, though tribal fighting has had its victims, and bloody ceremonies have constantly taken place. This primitive though doubtless happy state of nature must not be permitted to continue, they say; the poor creatures must be clothed and taught our theories of thought; they must eat our food and drink, and in all things do as we do. The white man, aided by his firearms and more powerful fire-water, has indulged, and still indulges, his civilizing fads to the utmost, doubtless with pleasing results to his easily-satisfied conscience. By saving millions of souls and transplanting them to heavenly regions beyond his ken, he clears from off his path the horrid unclothed savage who has for ages encumbered this fair earth, depriving the infinitely superior white of its enjoyments and pleasures. The centuries which must elapse may, perhaps, be numbered on one hand, when the survivors of the fittest at that period will be obliged to turn their civilizing minds to their own race, for all others will by that time have departed, civilized from off the face of the earth.

But I have digressed from my duellists. They were well aware that only certain portions of their persons, according to their law, were open for attack, and that any infringement in this respect would there and then be visited upon them with condign punishment by the tribe. Billy and Jackey stood opposite to each other within arm's-length. Each held in his hand the blade of a butcher's knife broken from the handle. The blade had been tightly wrapped round with opossum wool to within an inch of the point; the bare point, sharpened on both sides like a lancet, could only inflict a wound an inch deep, but no more, as the wrappings prevented further penetration. The men had for seconds two old women, who, I was told, were their mothers. They were madly excited, and jumped round about the gladiators, one of whom presently stepped quite close to his antagonist and plunged his knife as deep as it would go into the fleshy part of his arm. The wounded man never moved or winced in the slightest degree. The knife was drawn down the arm, and made a tremendous gash, quite four inches long. The attacker now became the attacked, and received a similar cut with equal stoicism. Thus alternately the carving went on. Afterwards the hips and thighs were slashed in the same way, until both men stood in a pool of blood, the ground being actually soft and slippery with it.

At length one of the two staggered slightly. The old women, who had until now encouraged them to the utmost of their power, then seized their sons and led them off to their gunyas. The men now presented a truly horrible spectacle. They were covered with gaping wounds, but only on the arms, hips, and thighs; no cut was upon a vital part; neither did any artery seem injured. How either of them could have borne such vivisection—and that without a sign of suffering—passes belief. When taken to the gunyas, their wounds, without being washed, were plastered up by the old women with stiff clay, worked to the consistency of putty, a large ball of which had been prepared, in readiness for the conclusion of the duel. Who was considered to be the victor I could not make out.

A fortnight later, I visited the camp, and saw the men. Though stiff, both appeared to be fast on their way to recovery, their wounds healing and the clay plaster chipping and falling off in several places.

I asked the bereaved Jackey where his wife was. With an English oath, he pointed to a young woman pegging out an opossum-skin, and said, "Bail me got it gin, Jackey keep it now." Poor Jackey seemed to feel her loss as little as he did the cuts received on her behalf. I inquired of the lady herself what were her feelings. She replied: "Bail Jackey budgeree (no good); Billy cabon budgeree" (very good), showing her white teeth and laughing as she spoke. The new arrangement was evidently agreeable to all parties. Jackey would soon console himself by taking or stealing a fresh wife, while the welts and scars on his body would prove an outward and visible sign of his courage.

While at the camp a young fellow informed me he was "cabon sick, close up bung" (nearly dead), and requested me to feel his stomach, in which he imagined there was a muddlow, or small water-worn pebble about the size of a walnut. This idea is prevalent among most of the natives, and is kept alive by their old men or doctors as a proof of their supernatural power in the healing art. If a black feels unwell from indigestion, he fancies he has a muddlow in his inside. How it got into its position does not trouble him; but if it be not speedily extracted, the thought of its dire effects will kill him. So he consults his medical adviser—some old man of the tribe—who then passes his hand over the part, pretending to find its locality. At length he stops suddenly, exclaiming that he has found it, and forthwith proceeds to remove it. The patient is desired to place himself in a recumbent position, while the doctor, from his dirty dilly-bag, or medical instrument-case, produces a long string of twisted hair some yards in length. Then, taking the invalid by the foot, he ties one end of the string round the great toe, and squatting down at as great a distance as the string permits, he has some water handed to him in a hollow piece of wood. This he places between his knees. In taking the string from his bag he also takes from it a pebble kept by him for such occasions, concealing it in his mouth when about to perform the operation of extracting a muddlow. The other end of the string he puts in his mouth. He then begins to suck and pull until his gums begin to bleed. After this he expectorates into the hollow vessel, which he then hands round for inspection to the admiring inhabitants of the camp who are standing round to witness the cure. To the accompaniment of numerous exclamations as to his healing power, the doctor gives a more vigorous pull, and then a powerful gulp, and finally produces the stone, or muddlow, from his mouth. The patient is at once relieved. The old scamp of a doctor then receives the congratulations of his dupes, the sick man having permitted his imagination to carry him to such a pitch as momentarily to expect death, and looking all the while as if his last moment were at hand.

I fear civilized society is not altogether free from a similar description of charlatan. How wonderfully imagination can affect the mind if not held in subjection! I will relate another instance of this. I had once occasion to visit a shepherd's hut. The hut-keeper was somewhat impressionable on the subject of snakes. All stories respecting them he read with avidity, and the symptoms of snake-poisoning he knew by heart from books. When I arrived at his hut the door was shut, and deep groans could be heard coming from within. I went in. The man lay on the bed, white as a sheet, to all appearance near his last gasp. I spoke to him, and then, with much difficulty and after many long pauses, he made me understand that some hours before my arrival he had gone to the creek for a bucket of water. The path was narrow and the grass was long. He had trod on a black snake, which sprang up and bit his shin. After telling me this, he closed his eyes, evidently preparing for death. I turned up the leg of his trousers, but could find no punctures by a snake's fangs, but across the shin-bone there was a discoloured line half an inch long and about the breadth of a straw. I knew well that no snake could have caused this mark, so I left the hut and followed the track to the creek. There I found the bucket which the man had taken for the water, and which in his fright he had thrown from him. As I searched about the place, I stood on a small iron hoop that lay hidden in the grass. The mystery was now as plain to me as noonday. The man had stepped on the edge of this hoop, and it had sprung up and struck his shin.

Taking the hoop back with me, I found the man, as I thought, dead. I felt his pulse; it still beat, but very feebly. I caught him by his shoulders and roughly forced him into a sitting position, holding him thus until I had placed the hoop on his toe; then, on doubling it up, I saw that the edge just covered the mark on his shin. A vigorous shake made him open his eyes. I then pointed to his leg, shouting at the top of my voice into his ear: "There is the snake that bit you!" Then, after I had given him two or three more shakes, he recovered a little, and gradually I made him understand. But the shock had been so powerful that for several days he was as weak as an infant. Had I not gone to his hut I feel certain that he would have died in a few hours, for he had all the symptoms of snake-bite.

Of course, many deaths from real snake-bites occur from want of knowledge. All snakes are not poisonous, nor have all fangs. To be bitten by one is enough for most people, but then, as likely as not, the bite is of less consequence than that of a cat. A bite, to be venomous, must be given by a snake that has fangs. These are situated one on each side of the upper jaw, and are much longer than the teeth. A poisonous bite will show only two punctures, those of the fangs; while one that is innocuous will show many punctures, those from the teeth.

CHAPTER XX.

PUNISHING THE BLACKS.

OUR nearest neighbour—a certain Captain S——
—lived thirty miles from us. In early life he had been in command of a Sydney whaler, and after several successful voyages, he had managed to save sufficient money to stock some country taken up by his nephew, who had gained his colonial experience as a stockman on a cattle station on Darling Downs. This rough, honest old sea-dog entered into partnership with his nephew, and with the assistance of two half-civilized black boys, managed to work his station, though in a somewhat slovenly manner. His expenses on the score of wages were *nil*, for he did the necessary cooking for his own establishment. Being only possessed of a small herd of a few hundred cattle, his nephew and the black boys were sufficient to work them.

The Captain had never in his life been on a horse's back. His means of locomotion when he travelled, and that was but seldom, was an old gig. This he termed his whale-boat. Guns or firearms of every description he held in supreme contempt, preferring an old harpoon as his constant companion when he moved about, and this he carried in his gig. There it lay at his feet, with some twenty fathoms of line attached to it, rolled in ship-shape fashion under the seat.

This station was much infested with wild and troublesome natives. They killed some of his cattle, and latterly had grown so bold as to threaten his own life. The old man, brave as a lion so long as his harpoon was by, cared little for any human being, whether white or black. On one occasion, his nephew had been absent on business for several days, and the Captain remained all alone at the house. Some blacks came to the door begging—at first in a whining tone—for tobacco, when they soon made the discovery that no one but he was at home. Their demands then became more peremptory, and they threatened to "num cull" (kill him) if he did not comply with their request. This was too much for the Captain, who at once seized his harpoon and held it in a defiant attitude. The blacks, surprised at the sight of a weapon somewhat resembling their own spears, drew back, whereupon the door was closed in their faces and securely barred by the Captain. Several nullahs were then thrown by his assailants, and struck it heavily. He opened the wooden shutter of the only window in his domicile. As he did so, a spear was thrown through it, and narrowly escaped his head, burying itself in the opposite wall. That mischief was intended he had now no doubt, so, biding his time, he watched the natives through a small hole. Suddenly he threw open the shutter and launched the harpoon at a big fellow near, who received it in his thigh with a yell of pain. Before he could pull it out, he was surprised to see it jump out of itself and then return with lightning speed to the Captain at the window. This fairly settled him. He limped off as best he could, and his fellow-attackers, running as if the devil were behind them, fled for their lives.

A spear with a string attached was a new weapon of war to them; they could not understand it at all. For some months after this encounter the blacks kept well away from the Captain's homestead. That they were still in the broken mountainous country situated some miles distant was well known, as smoke could frequently be seen rising high above the dense brigalow timber at the foot of the hills.

Some cattle belonging to the Captain's herd had strayed into this country, and there they had multiplied and become very wild. One day his nephew got on their tracks, and followed them well into the ranges, a part of the country never before visited by him. To his astonishment he was suddenly confronted by four natives, who made signs in a threatening manner that he must proceed no further. As he took no notice of this, they placed their spears in their woomeras, and poised them to throw at him, while by their language, which he partly understood, he gathered that they meant to kill him. Being unarmed, except for an old horse-pistol, he turned his horse. He had no sooner done so than two spears were thrown, one of which struck his horse in the hip, while the other passed through the fleshy part of his own arm. Fortunately, neither was barbed. He pulled the one in his arm out, while his horse, leaping forward, freed itself of the other. Discretion being the better part of valour, he put spurs to his horse and swiftly made for home.

Some days afterwards, he came over to my station. He had his arm bound up, and complained of the pain it was causing him. I examined it, and found it much swollen. As I knew that the blacks do not poison their weapons, I considered that the inflammation was caused by dirt, or perhaps by a small splinter of the spear remaining in the wound. I therefore made him apply a poultice, and this relieved the pain.

After he had related the story of his escape, we decided that this kind of thing must be stopped, otherwise the country might become too hot for us all, few in numbers and widely dispersed as we were, surrounded by hundreds of natives only waiting an opportunity to murder us if they could safely do so. That evening it was arranged that Todd, my friend, and myself, with my cattle overseer, would return next day to the Captain's station with his nephew, and do something to teach the blacks civility.

When we got there, we found the old man pacing up and down in front of his door, just as if he were on the poop of his ship. His harpoon, with the coil of rope, lay close at hand. We could not help laughing as, hitching up his trousers and clearing his mouth of an enormous quid of tobacco, he welcomed our arrival with: "There she spouts, my boys, two points on the weather-bow!" and pointing to the ranges in the far distance, where a white pillar of smoke, not unlike the spouting of a whale, could be seen rising into the clear sky, he continued, "No thresher, but real sperm!" With many other whaling phrases, unintelligible to us, he ushered us into his cabin, as he called his small house.

We had never been in it before, but the internal arrangements corresponded to that of a ship's cabin in the most wonderful manner. He had built it with his own hands, economizing space to the utmost. Two tiers of bunks ran round the side; the table, when not in use, rose to the roof with the assistance of pulleys weighted by old axe-heads; boxes or lockers were in every imaginable place, while a ship's cooking-stove stood at one end.

The heat inside this abode being unbearable, we retired to a bark shed outside, while the Captain got ready some refreshment. After we had waited some time, his jolly red face, dripping with moisture, appeared at the door, summoning us to dinner. On the table smoked an enormous sea-pie, and for vegetables, a dish of marshmallows. We had repeated apologies from our host for the absence of rum. Tea washed down the pie quite as well. It was first-rate, and was eaten with keen relish by us all.

We now discussed the safest and best means of punishing our black neighbours, and at the same time teaching them that they must behave themselves in future. The top of a high peak, easy of access by a spur running into a valley, gave a commanding view of the surrounding country. We arranged to camp in the valley after dark, and ascend the peak before daybreak. The valley was distant about six miles. Our idea was that the exact locality of the blacks' encampment could be ascertained from that elevation in the early morning by the smoke rising from their fires. We then intended to take them by surprise and punish them by destroying their weapons, etc. Having thus settled matters to our satisfaction, we lay in the shade, smoking and sleeping till supper. The sea-pie, now cold, but quite as appetizing, was again in request, its size being considerably diminished by our second onslaught.

At length we were ready for the fray, and we mounted our horses. Our party numbered five—we three, my overseer, and the nephew; all were armed witih revolvers, while Todd had a rifle besides. A small watercourse guided us to the valley, which we reached about 10 p.m. Though all of us were smokers, not one of us struck a light. Some, after the fashion of the old Captain, placed a quid in their mouths by way of solace, but we all felt that no light must be exhibited under any pretext. Our horses we tied to trees, and stretched ourselves on the dewy ground. No sound came from the thicket but the hum of many mosquitos, the whirring cry of the opossum, and now and again the howl of a stray dingoe. The bright stars twinkled down on us as if they said, "We can see you; from us you cannot hide."

Unfortunately, notwithstanding all our precautions, others than stars saw us. At the first note of the magpie, or peep-of-day bird, as he is called, four of us began to ascend the spur. Todd we left behind to mind the horses. Now the laughing jackass gave us his opinion of our proceedings by greeting us with shouts of hoarse, chuckling, derisive laughter, possibly because, from his elevated perch on a dead limb, he could see much more than we could. Proceeding slowly and cautiously, we at length arrived at the top, where we lay flat on our faces, so as to be unobserved from any point. The sun had not yet risen. From many parts of the sea of leafy verdure below us smoke-like mists slowly rose, but nothing having the appearance of real smoke gave us any indication of the blacks' whereabouts.

The sun rose, casting his slanting beams far over the forest; the mists were soon dispersed, and all seemed settling down for a peaceful but broiling hot Australian day. We rose to a sitting position and lit our longed-for pipes. We were considering what our next move should be, when our reverie was suddenly interrupted, for a nullah bounded close to us, striking a tree and causing the bark to fly in every direction. Had it struck any one of us, broken limbs if not death must have ensued. In a moment our revolvers were in our hands. But no foe was then visible on whom to try their effect, nor had we any idea from what quarter the next missile might come.

Our suspense did not last long, however, for over a dozen black fellows suddenly appeared from behind the trunk of a tree about thirty yards away. Quick as thought our four revolvers rang out, and then what we supposed to be the echo sounded another shot away down in the valley. That some of our shots had told was certain, for the astonished niggers turned and fled, one limping, while the arm of another hung loosely by his side. We gave them a parting volley, but they were then out of pistol-shot. No doubt this was the first time any of them had faced the weapon of the white man.

Thankful for our escape, we quickly made our way down to Todd. We found him in a sorry plight. He was sitting on a log with barely a particle of clothing on him, and was binding his thumb with a strip of his torn shirt. For a moment his situation was incomprehensible to us, but he soon enlightened us by telling us to look behind a tree a short distance from where he sat. There we found the body of one of the most powerful natives we had ever seen, shot through the back and stretched full length on his face.

Before Todd vouchsafed another word of explanation, he undid the rag from his thumb, and begged me to examine it. I found the first joint crushed, as if it had been hammered between two stones, the bone and flesh being reduced to a shapeless mass. He quietly requested me to amputate it at the joint, handing me his jack-knife for the purpose. It was my first amputation, but not the first that I had witnessed. To save the joint being an impossibility, I reluctantly obeyed him. He placed the injured thumb on the stump of a tree, and just below the fractured part I placed the knife. One blow with a stout piece of wood on its back, and the operation was over. I then carefully bound up the thumb, and then Todd gave us full particulars of his adventure.

When we parted from him, he had sat down at the foot of an iron-bark tree, patiently waiting for the sun to rise, so that he might light his pipe. His rifle and revolver lay a few yards from him. Thinking of no danger, he supposed he fell asleep, when bang on the tree's butt, only a few inches from his head, came a nullah, covering him with pieces of broken bark. Springing to his feet, he was confronted by the giant I have mentioned. Whence he came Todd could not say. In his hand he held a waddie, with which he aimed a blow at Todd's head. This he evaded, and sprang at his intending murderer, dealing him blow after blow in the face. To his astonishment these, which would have felled a white man, only staggered the black. One, however, struck the wrist, and sent the waddie flying from his hand. Both were now unarmed, and were locked in a death-struggle. By some means Todd's thumb got into the mouth of the black fellow, who crushed it between his teeth. Mad with pain, Todd dealt him a powerful blow in the stomach. This doubled him up; then, freeing himself from Todd, he ran away. Todd instantly seized his rifle and fired, and the black fell dead. This was the shot we had heard in the valley.

There is not the slightest doubt that the blacks had by some means discovered our approach to their camp, and followed our footsteps, intending to kill our whole party. I suppose they thought that the big giant would give a sufficiently good account of Todd, and that as our party to the peak was a large one, a proportionately greater number must be told off to settle us.

We returned to the old Captain's house or cabin. He met us at the door, shouting, as if through a speaking-trumpet: "What cheer, boys? What cheer? Where away is the fish?"

After hearing of Todd's adventure, he paused for a moment. Then, calling to his nephew to clear away the whale-boat, he shouted: "By the living Jingo, I'll have the bone if I lose the blubber!" His nephew replied that he might get the gig himself, as he thought, for his part, that he had done enough. Away, however, went the old Captain to catch his horse, which he soon placed in the shafts. The harpoon and line he fixed in the usual place. He then got in and bade us good-bye, and addressing the horse with a "Pull away, my hearty!" he drove towards the valley.

I never visited his station afterwards, but I was told that for many a long day a grinning skull and cross-bones decorated his cabin.

The lesson we had given the blacks was sufficient. They troubled the Captain no more. Todd's loss did not in reality do him much injury. It was the thumb of his left hand, and he often remarked that he was not a penn'orth the worse.

Our treatment of the natives may be deemed unjustifiable by some. Naturally they may say that it was their country, and ask what business we had there? Quite so; but the same argument may be used in all new countries. It will not hold water, however, nor can we change the unalterable law of Nature. For untold centuries the aborigines have had the use of the country, but in the march of time they, like the extinct fossil, must make way. They now encumber the ground, and will not suit themselves to altered circumstances. The sooner they are taught that a superior race has come among them, and are made to feel its power, the better for them. To temporize with them is the greatest cruelty; one sharp lesson is worth a dozen shilly-shally ones, and in the end less suffering and bloodshed will have been caused. The survival of the fittest is Nature's law and must be obeyed. Let those impugn it who will.

CHAPTER XXI.

GROG—AND OTHER TROUBLES.

I DO not think that in any part of the world time flies, or has the appearance of flying, so rapidly as in the Australian bush. The years come and go with but little change, unless, in some season out of the common, an unusual drought or flood has to be registered. The days and months go by unnoticed and unrecorded. There is the same sombre green from January to December; in the unchanging woods no fall of the leaf varies the landscape, nor are there any of the beautiful autumnal tints which are found elsewhere. Buds and opening leaves are apparently absent, or might as well be; they have no set time for bursting into life, and are therefore unobserved, their birth and death taking place at all seasons of the year. With the herbage and wild flora it is different. After the slight winter frosts, Nature bursts forth in all her glory, clothing the naked earth with gorgeous but, for the most part, scentless flowers. These soon fade, however, their short lives being often scorched and blighted in the bud.

Shearing and lambing are, of course, the great events in a squatter's life. On the return of either, he can hardly believe that a whole twelve months have fled. I know I have found it so. Others, however, may have a different impression. Be that as it may, another year had come, and the shearers were again congregating in the hut set apart for their use. As a class, no change had taken place in their appearance or habits. They blasphemed, grumbled, and were as impudent as ever. This was only the natural state of things, and therefore to be expected; but what I did not expect was that they should have discovered by some means that the station supply dray had brought, among other things, a small keg of rum for the use of my friend and myself.

On the first morning when shearing was to commence, all the men marched up to the house in a body after breakfast; the spokesman demanding as a right that each man should be served with a glass of grog. This I resented in no measured terms, but he replied that they knew we had spirits in the store, and that they were determined to have some, irrespective of all consequences. My position was serious, for I was surrounded by over thirty ruffians, and had only Todd, my friend, and the two overseers to resist them. However, I had made up my mind that, come what might, they should not have the spirits. Seeing this, they all returned to their hut, threatening dire revenge of some kind. Their spokesman, a powerful but lanky fellow, whom, from his nasal twang, I took to be an American, became at once a marked man, and vigilant eyes, though he did not know it, were upon all his movements.

The shearing bell rang for the men to start work, but there was no response from the hut. Not a man answered the summons. Again it rang, but with a like result. Todd and I then went to the hut, but we did not enter. On our demanding the reason of their disobedience, the Yankee chap came to the door, and said he guessed he was G—— d—— certain no sheep would be shorn until each man had had a wet of grog. To this I replied that I was equally certain they would have no grog. He then said: "I guess you will rue it!"

All that day no shearing was done. I would not keep the sheep penned up longer, so I determined the following morning that something definite must be attempted. Todd was for muzzling the ruffian at once, but I knew something of Yankees of his stamp, and their bowie-knives. But what to do under the circumstances, I did not know. At length, as all stratagems are fair in war, I thought of ringing the bell next morning as usual. Then, if the men were still in revolt, I intended to reason with them. While I did this, Todd was to watch his opportunity, and, if possible, fell the spokesman with his fist, and place a pair of handcuffs on him, while I kept the others at bay with my revolver.

When morning came, the bell again rang at sunrise. To the shed came the Yankee with seven or eight shearers at his heels. I quietly let them know that I thought their conduct shameful, and that, for their own sakes, the sooner they commenced work the better. As for getting grog, they need not try that game any longer; not one drop should any of them have.

"Then, by G——, we'll take it!" cried the Yankee.

The words were barely spoken when Todd said: "Will you, by G——? Take that first!' And his fist struck the ruffian right on the mouth, dropping him on his knees.

Like a flash of lightning he pulled from his side or breast a long bowie-knife, but a second blow from Todd on his arm snapped the bone as if it had been a carrot. The knife fell at his feet, and was at once secured by Todd. I drew my revolver, and the sight of it caused the rapid retreat of all the others. We took the wounded scoundrel into the shed, where I bound his arm in splints made of pieces of split wood.

To the surprise of all of us, up rode Lieutenant B—— and his black troopers. No arrival could possibly have been more welcome to me. He had been patrolling his large district in pursuit of a prisoner who had escaped from a country lock-up. He had been arrested for attempted murder, but had somehow managed to escape. One look at the Yankee showed the lieutenant that he was the man he wanted. I gladly delivered him into his charge, and next morning he was placed on a horse led by a trooper, and we saw him no more. However, the newspapers subsequently informed us that he was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment at the Rockhampton Assizes.

It was beautiful to see with what alacrity the shearers buckled to their work after this attempted riot. There was no more demand for grog, and Todd was held in the greatest respect.

Everything now went on better than I had known at any former shearing, until one day near the finish. The weather, which had hitherto been all that could be desired, now changed from intense heat to a slight chill; the sky assumed a leaden hue on the horizon; heavy masses of thunder-cloud steadily rose higher and higher; the wind, which had been blowing, fell away to a complete calm, and a dead silence prevailed. A low moaning sound came from the direction of the cloud-bank, and grew louder and louder, like the rushing of distant water. The white clouds then began rolling over each other, bulging at their margins like great sails. The wind gathered strength, blowing a stiff gale, and from the sky long slanting streaks, like sun-rays, descended to the earth. This state of things did not last long. Away over the plain a sullen roar was heard, all distant objects being lost to view, and the hail was upon us. In a rushing, mighty wind it came; single stones, not larger than peas, and then, not hail, but pieces of ice, came down with a force as if from a catapult. The trees bent their heads; broken branches, leaves, and bark flew whirling through the air, while in many places the roof of the wool-shed contributed flying shingles to the general pell-mell of objects hurled before the tempest. The ice lumps bounded and danced on the ground, while in their descent they left deep indentations in the bark of the trees. The plain, or what little of it was visible, was white as a sheet. To venture from shelter caused suffering almost as great as if one had been pelted with blue metal.

And the sheep—alas! The poor shorn creatures! Many lay dead and others dying in the shed yards; a few had taken refuge round the fence, and there, standing closely crushed together, had trampled to death many of their less fortunate companions. Nothing could be done to save them; they would not move, but with backs humped and drooping heads received the pitiless blows on their unprotected bodies as long as they could stand. They fell in struggling heaps of dead and dying all over the yard, half covered by ice, hail, and dirty running water. The storm did not last many minutes; it had passed us, and continuing its devastating course before the wind, was quickly lost to hearing. The sun now shone overhead from a cloudless sky, and speedily converted the ice heaps—in many places over a foot in depth—into muddy water.

To number the dead was now my unpleasant occupation. All the shorn sheep, with the exception of fifty or sixty that had got under the shed, were either dead or paralyzed to such an extent that their recovery was hopeless. During those few moments of storm, I lost eight hundred and ninety sheep. In the words of Byron:

"I counted them at break of day,
And when the sun set, where were they?"

It may seem ridiculous to quote the above lines, but my sheep were quite as much to me, perhaps more, than the ships or sailors of a king in ancient times. Fortunately the storm only covered a narrow tract of country, not more than half a mile wide. All my out-station huts and sheep escaped; not a hail-stone fell on any of them. But for years after the course of that storm was as plain through the timbered country as if the trees had been battered by an artillery fire. They were stripped of their leaves, while the ground was strewn with broken branches, and the side presented by their trunks to the hail bore deep marks in their bark, as if it had been struck by millions of bullets.

Storms like this do not occur often, nor do they cover any great extent of country. Sheep not shorn are rarely killed by them, but to those freshly shorn they are deadly in the extreme.

Such is the squatter's life. He, more than most men, knows not what a day may bring forth, and, taking for his motto *Nil desperandum*, he must continue the uncertain and often hazardous tenour of his way. But, again to quote the poet:

"Wouldst thou be a happy liver?
Let the past be past for ever!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A FOOL AND HIS PARTNER.

OUT west from my station the country had been little explored. Owing to the absence of rivers of any magnitude, it was considered worthless for pastoral purposes. The making of tanks or the conservation of water was then unknown, or, if it was thought of, it was considered too expensive as long as country supplied with natural water could still be discovered. It was not until the early sixties that the immense plains west of the Darling, Paroo, and other rivers attracted the attention of squatters. Several expeditions were then formed by more or less well-equipped parties, to test the country's capabilities.

To my surprise, one of these rode up to the homestead one morning. It consisted of only two men, each leading a pack-horse besides the one he was riding. Of course, I was glad to see them, and as their horses were jaded, I invited them to spell for a few days, which they gladly did. They were returning after an unsuccessful expedition, and this was not to be wondered at, as they had quarrelled on their way out, and were now barely on speaking terms.

One, it did not take me long to discover, was little less than a consummate fool. Unfortunately he was the capitalist. The other, a smart but rough young Australian bushman, was without capital, but had plenty of brains and experience. On the morning after their arrival, the latter accompanied me to the stock-yard, and, seating himself on a rail, gave me an account of their trip.

"That d—— galloot," said he, meaning his partner, "is the biggest chuckle-headed ass God ever created. He is going back to England—a good job too; we don't want fools in this country. I can't say what England is like; if it is the same as Australia, except he has a brand put on him, and fastens a bell round his neck, he'll lose himself as sure as God made little apples.

"It is now more than two blessed months since we started. The first day was enough to show me what a fool I had in charge. All day he had been telling me how he got on when jackerooing on Darling Downs, and what a jolly life he led. He expected we were out now to discover country far better than Jimbour or Canning Downs, two of the finest stations in Australia. 'If you find country half as good, you will be lucky,' I said to him. He replied: 'I have been studying the map of Australia, and from the lie of the country there must be a repetition of Darling Downs somewhere out west. Ever since I have been here I have noticed you see a blue range in the distance. When you come to its top you see another, and so on. Now, it strikes me it is the same with country; if you go far enough, take my word for it, we shall find a new Darling Downs.'

"I remarked: 'You had better fix up your bridle,' for a short time before he had got off his horse to pick up his hat, and in remounting had crossed the reins under the animal's throat. He could see nothing wrong. To save him trouble, I fixed them properly. He thanked me, saying he supposed that was why his horse wanted to go in a direction contrary to what he wished. 'Very probably,' I replied, and, caring very little for his foolish talk, rode ahead.

"We each led a pack-horse. Some are the devil to lead; ours were none of the best, but with a little judgment they were easily enough managed. I had been showing him how to keep his well up to his side, instead of two or three yards behind at the full length of the halter. Somehow or other he could not understand how to do this, so I let him have his way. It was a case of pull horse, pull fool. To ease his hand, he had, unknown to me, fastened a coat-strap round his arm; tying the halter of his led horse to it, he then started off at a canter to overtake me, I being considerably in advance. His pack-horse suddenly propped, jerking him clean out of the saddle. It was a wonder he was not killed. Hearing a shout of 'Whoa!' I looked round. His saddle-horse was nearly up to me, and about a hundred yards behind he lay stretched on his back like a turtle, the pack-horse, still fast to his arm, pulling him like one o'clock. A few pious expressions at his arrant stupidity escaped me. When I got to him I unbuckled the strap, and released him from his dangerous position. I could not help asking him if that was the way they led pack-horses on Darling Downs.

" Mounting him again, I advised him to take the lead, saying that I would touch up his pack-horse. Pointing to a gap in the range, I directed him to steer for it. A few minutes of his steering was enough for me. He could not keep a straight line, but zig-zagged like a drunken man. A few sharp cuts from my whip taught his horse better manners, and then, not wishing to go round the world for sport, I again went ahead, the gap I pointed to being the place I intended for our first night's camp. All this humbugging had delayed us. To get there before dark we had no time to lose, so we had to go without lunch. This much distressed my companion, of whom I was now heartily sick.

" When we got to a nice bit of feed for the horses, close to a water-hole, we unsaddled. Leaving him to light a fire, I watered and hobbled the horses. I was some time away, thinking he would be sure to place the quart pots on the fire. On my return, I found he had done nothing of the kind, but was rubbing away at his revolver. 'Put down your shooting-iron,' I said, inwardly swearing all the time. 'What do you want with your pistol ?' 'The wild blacks might spot and murder us before we have our supper,' he replied. 'It is as well to be prepared. Should they come, I will give them something to remember me by.' 'We'll see when the time comes,' I said. 'Where have you lighted the fire?' 'Oh, by Jove! I forgot all about it,' said he. I now became riled. 'Look here,' I said, 'this is our first day's stage. If you don't shape differently, the sooner we turn back the better. Look alive, and fill the quart pots.' I gathered some sticks, and soon had a roaring fire behind a log. 'Are you sure there are no snakes about?' he asked. 'That is your look-out. They won't bite me,' I said to him.

"He continued asking foolish questions for some time after supper, until I felt sleepy, and requested him to shut up. I must have slept some time, when, gently nudging me, he said he heard the blacks. 'All right,' I said, 'have a shot. Be sure not to miss them when they come.' Turning over, I was again soon fast asleep.

"The moon had set, and it was towards midnight, when bang! bang! went his revolver. Jumping up, I called, 'What the devil are you up to now?' Shaking as if he had the palsy, he pointed towards the water-hole at some object moving near it. Just then I heard the click of the hobble-chains, the horses having come to the hole to drink. 'You infernal idiot!' I cried. 'It is well your fright has made you miss. Could not your brains, if you had any, tell you what you are blazing at? Do go to sleep.'

"Day at length broke. Telling him to fill the quart pots for breakfast, I went after the horses, which I found had not been injured by the shooting.

This time he did fill the pots, and we had breakfast, after which we arranged the packs and continued our journey.

"For several weeks nothing particular happened. I rode in front, he following, and little conversation passed between us. One day, when near a water-hole, we did see the tracks of blacks, but they were not very fresh. Many of them had been made by women and children. When I see the latter, I have little fear; the men, when mischief is intended, generally keep their womenkind out of the way. All that day he kept close to me, riding by my side. This was a nuisance in narrow passages between boulders, or in scrubby country.

"We must now have travelled about two hundred and fifty miles when he asked me if I thought we should soon find the country. 'Are you tired and anxious to return?' I asked. 'Oh, no! but I thought we should have found some before this. Do you think we shall find our way back?' 'That is my look-out,' I replied, 'provided we are not killed and eaten.'

"For the last few days we had been travelling over fair open country, with but very little water. I knew from its appearance that we must soon reach a river. Blacks' tracks were becoming more plentiful, and my partner's fears increasing in proportion.

"One evening we came upon a number of women fishing in a large water-hole; one or two old men were with them. My companion immediately pulled out his revolver, and was for blazing into them. The poor creatures were as much frightened as he was, and that is saying a good deal. 'Shall I pot that fellow?' he said, pointing his revolver at an old grey-haired cripple, in a fearful state from giggle-giggle, a kind of mange, contracted, I fancy, from their dogs. 'If you don't put up your pistol,' I said to him, 'by the holy poker, I'll knock you off your horse!' No part of the women but their heads could be seen; they had crouched down in the water through fear of his terrible weapon, not knowing what it was. The sun shone brightly on it, and made it conspicuous.

"There being no appearance of any other water near, I was obliged to camp. Soon the women became reassured, and coming out offered us some fish. In exchange I gave them tobacco. They then left for their camp on the other side of the water-hole. Wishing to bake a damper, I went to the pack-saddle for the flour-bag—it was my partner's business to look after the provisions—but no flour-bag could I find. On questioning him, all he could recollect was placing it on a log in the morning when arranging the packs. 'Are you content to look for your Darling Downs country and live on salt beef and wattle gum?' I asked him. 'Before we get back to where we camped last night the blessed kangaroo rats or dingoes will have torn the bag to smithereens.'

"The hope of discovering his imaginary paradise in the desert faded with the loss of the flour-bag. 'I have had enough of this disgusting country,' he said. 'I will return to England as quickly as I can. You Australians don't know how to treat an English gentleman.' 'The devil we don't,' I remarked, cutting him short. 'Back is the word, old man.'

"We roasted the fish we got from the black women, and had still enough left for breakfast. Rolling ourselves in our rugs, and not speaking a word, we turned in for the night. I thought to myself: 'When this fool gets to England he'll spin a fine yarn and be believed, of course. No matter; he is not one of the right sort; his room is better than his company.' We had fish and tea for breakfast, and silently returned to our former camp on our way back. Fortunately we found the flour-bag intact. A miserable journey then followed. For some days not a dozen words passed between us."

My guest having now given me an account of his expedition, we returned to the house. They both left me next morning on their way to Rockhampton. What further unpleasant adventures they had together I cannot say.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BRUSH WITH A BUSHRANGER.

In the seven years during which I had managed this station the number of stock had more than doubled. The proprietor, who lived in Brisbane, intended returning to England, so, being desirous of realizing, he advertised the property for sale. A rumour reached us that a purchaser had been found, and that he was a married man with several grown-up daughters. This news caused no small sensation in the minds of my friend and Todd; and a general rummage of boxes for dress clothes that had not seen the light for years, took place.

Todd one day took me to his bed-room, telling me he had fixed the moths and silver-fish splendidly, and showed me an effigy like a scarecrow. While turning it round, he asked me if it was not fine? He explained that he had stuffed his whole dress suit with gum leaves, placing papers of mustard, pepper, and tobacco in the pockets. I remarked that in my opinion he was too late in taking precautions, as some of the garments had already the appearance of having been riddled by a charge of duck-shot.

His dress shirt, yellow as a buttercup, he had given to the Chinese cook to whiten. On going to the kitchen, the cook said to me:

"Massa, me tink Massa Todd close up cranky. He bring me welly old shirt. He say, 'John, you boil him; make him whitey like paper.' Me say, 'All right, too much peccy, too old.' He say, 'Suppose you make him whitey me give it plenty of tobacco.' So me boiley, boiley one, two, three fellow days. Every day Massa Todd take him out, he say, 'No whitey, John, no whitey.' Me tink him cranky."

All my young friends' trouble over their wardrobe proved useless, for the purchaser was a bachelor. At my recommendation Todd remained with him as manager, as I intended leaving. Never in my life did I feel parting with any one so keenly as with him. From the first day of our acquaintance until the last he was the same manly English gentleman, scorning to do a mean action, brave as a lion, yet tender-hearted as a woman. I never saw him again, as shortly after I left his father's death obliged him to return to England, where he also died shortly afterwards. He was the stuff of which successful colonists are made. It is to be regretted that there are so few like him.

Though still engaged in squatting pursuits, my life from henceforth became more settled. I married, and undertook the management of the Dalgangal Station, Upper Burnett, Queensland. The Burnett had for many years been settled, although blacks were still to be met with. The number of ladies in the district prevented their appearing at the homesteads in a nude state, but while hunting in the bush they still discarded clothes. The bushranging mania was now rife in both New South Wales and Queensland, and for some months in 1866 we were in continual dread of a visit from one styling himself "The Wild Scotchman," as well as from a German named "Biermaister." Both these men were prowling about the country. The latter had stuck up the Maryborough mail, while the former, though often seen on our run, never molested us further than sticking up our mail and opening our letters. The black police and their officers were frequently on our station on the look-out for them.

On New Year's night, 1867, one of my men, returning late to the homestead, told me he felt certain the Scotchman was camped in a gully near the house. We were now all excitement to effect his capture. The moon was shining brightly, and we considered the best plan to adopt was to wait until midnight, when the man was likely to be asleep, and then pounce upon him.

When midnight arrived, I and several gentlemen who were spending the evening with us, dressed ourselves in dark clothes, these being less conspicuous than our white coats in the bright moonlight. We armed ourselves with revolvers, and sallied forth. At the place mentioned, we found the supposed bushranger rolled in his blanket asleep. We rushed upon him, and, seizing his arms, made him prisoner, Pulling off the blanket which covered his face, we discovered our captive to be a stockman from a neighbouring station. The poor man was almost frightened to death at the strange proceedings. We soon explained the thing to him, however, whereupon a general laugh ensued. We returned to the house, he none the worse for his New Year's night adventure, and we rather crestfallen. The ladies greatly enjoyed the mistake, being no longer anxious about our safety.

The Scotchman was eventually taken by two young gentlemen who were first-class riders. They pursued him through bush and briar until his horse gave in. When tried at the Maryborough Assizes, he was only condemned to twenty years' imprisonment, as he had never taken life, but his good conduct while in gaol got him a remittance of several years in his sentence, and he afterwards became a reformed man.

Biermaister was, I think, slightly out of his mind. He had been arrested by the police, from whom he had escaped. One of my black boys informed me that he had seen a man answering his description on the run, about six miles from the homestead. He was carrying a double-barrelled gun. I gave the black boy a revolver, as he was a good shot. Taking one also with me, we started in pursuit (my wife being terribly anxious *this* time). We were not long before we came on his tracks, and caught sight of him at a turning in the road. Being a magistrate, I had given the black boy orders that when I challenged him in the Queen's name to throw down his gun, if he did not immediately obey, or if he presented it at us, he was to cover him with his revolver. As yet he had not seen us, although we were only a couple of hundred yards behind him. Spurring our horses, we galloped up to him. The moment I challenged him, he dropped his gun without the slightest hesitation. Covered by the black boy's revolver, he submitted to have his hands fastened behind him with a coat-strap, and thus we marched our bushranger to the homestead. During all this time he never spoke a word.

How to keep him securely until the police arrived from Gayndah puzzled me. I could not at once send information to them, as the town was fifty miles distant—under eight hours—and it would take them the same time to arrive. As there was no lock-up on the station, I could only chain him to the verandah-post of the store. I did this by padlocking one end of a horse-trace chain round his neck, fixing the other end to the post in the same way, and never losing sight of him. It was weary work this constant watching for over sixteen hours, though he endured no hardship, for he was quite comfortable and in the shade. An amusing incident occurred. On my wife telling the cook to take him some dinner, she appeared greatly shocked at my wife's kindness, and asked if she should put salt, pepper, and mustard on his plate? On being told to do so, she went off thoroughly disgusted that a bushranger should be so treated, and particularly that he should have *mustard*.

At length the police arrived, and this time he was safely conveyed to prison. He was sentenced to fifteen years' with hard labour. I had no further experience with his class; indeed, he was nearly the last of the Queensland bushrangers.

During the ten years that I managed this station nothing else occurred out of the common run of events in bush life. The property was sold in 1873, when my wife and I left for Sydney. Hearing there of the rapid advance which West Australia was then making, I determined to go there, taking letters of introduction to the Colonial Secretary, Sir F. P. Barlee. He and I entered into partnership, and bought the Glengarry Station, two hundred and fifty miles north of Perth.

At that time I had had no experience of the squatter's curse—the scab insect in his sheep. If I had, no earthly inducement would have prevailed on me to buy a station infected by it; but experience as to its dire effects was now to be my lot. For ten long years I fought this infinitesimal, but, in the aggregate, gigantic foe. The old adage, "One scabby sheep infects the whole flock," is correct to the letter. The very bushes and rocks where they rub themselves become alive with this horrible and almost imperceptible insect. There for a length of time it survives on a piece of greasy wool, in readiness to carry fresh infection to any sheep coming in contact with it. This, together with bad seasons, made my life a misery, so I gave up the station, and dissolved partnership with my friend, Sir F. P. Barlee, in 1883.

The colony itself I liked. The climate, though dry, was delightful, and the colonists were kind and hospitable; but the country, which is immense in size, is poor in comparison with the other Australian colonies. The gold lately discovered has given it a start. This and the institution of responsible government are causing numbers to flock there, but even with this stimulus I fear West Australia must content herself to remain in the position of a poor relation to her more fortunate relatives. She has not the great desideratum to colonial success which they possess to repletion—an unlimited quantity of rich alluvial land.

The West Australian aborigines are of the same stock as the others, but they differ slightly in their language. Their weapons and rites are almost identical, with one exception—a peculiar mode of checking the population, a description of which I cannot, however, give in these pages. A different but an equally effectual one is practised in North Queensland.

In 1883 my wife and I returned to the eastern colonies, and there, with the exception of a trip taken by us to America, we have since remained.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DRAWBACKS OF CIVILIZATION.

Having had an intimate acquaintance with the Australian aborigines in every part—north, south, east, and west—of this vast island continent, I may be excused making some remarks as to their habits and the cause of their now almost total extinction. For a period of forty years it has been my lot to be thrown much among them. I have seen them when mine was the first white party on which they had ever set eyes. In those days their young men were fine, athletic fellows, while many of the young women were stout, robust, and healthy; a few were absolutely handsome; their full, magnificently developed forms could nowhere be surpassed, while their faces were more than comely, particularly when they smiled, exhibiting their ivory-like teeth. The skin diseases introduced by the whites were then absent, while their ebon, chocolate, and even lighter-coloured bodies were healthy, smooth, and without the scar of vice. Although they were naked, they were virtuous and moral, as they understood virtue and morality. At their camps old men and women and many children might be seen. No disturbing cares for the future troubled them; the rivers gave fish, and game was generally abundant on the plains and in the scrubs. They had their tribal law codes, which were strictly observed; their tribal wars were seldom deadly, although much blood might be spilt.

Again I have seen them after making the acquaintance of the white man and his baneful civilization. Demoralization had followed, though as yet only partially. The young men, still robust, had learned the use of tobacco and ardent spirits, for which they were willing to sell their wives and sisters to the white man. As to the young woman, they had fallen even lower than the men; the stamp of the white man's vices was perceptible on many; while all, or most of them, had lost that sense of delicacy which they formerly possessed, when, knowing no evil, as we understand it, they were therefore guiltless of it. With the white man's clothing, or scraps of it, decorating their persons, their modesty departed. While formerly a girl would probably stand in the posture of the Greek slave, her brazen, impudent looks could not now be misinterpreted.

The blanket had taken the place of the opossum or kangaroo-skin rug. The latter was warm and comfortable during the cold nights, while the wretched blanket proved a poor substitute for this purpose, most of them being half-rotten. They had formed part of some old military stores, bought by contractors from the Government, and were served out to the blacks on her Majesty's birthday, but they usually fell in pieces after a few days' use. I have tried one that had just been served out. On taking it by a corner and shaking it, the piece I grasped came away in my hand.

These doubtful gifts proved a source of untold evil. The blacks, at all times lazily inclined, took no more trouble to provide themselves with skins; without it they got a blanket, which let through both rain and damp, while their skin rugs did neither. How often have I seen the natives on a pouring wet day enveloped in these rotten, soaking coverings, developing consumption and rheumatism in their formerly hardy frames, which, if naked, soon dried, or which, as they sat in their gunyas upon their skin rugs, could be kept quite dry and comfortable.

In like manner did the scraps of filthy cast-off clothes which they hung upon themselves injure both men and women. While they went naked, colds and rheumatism were unknown, but now these were ever present with many of them.

Their taste for grog was insatiable. Had only pure and genuine spirits been procurable, the injury would have been less; but if the shanty-keeper poisoned the whites with impunity, why should he be less particular with the blacks? Indeed, many shanty-keepers boasted of how much tobacco, blue stone, or other biting and deadly ingredients they had placed in Jackey's or Billy's bottle.

One morning, on nearing a Queensland shanty, while the rain poured in torrents, my horse shied at something in a deep dray rut. There lay a young black woman, her blanket all in the mud. She still breathed, but was drunk. By her side was a bottle of some liquid. I smelt it, but what spirit it was I could not say. On emptying the contents, out fell tobacco leaf in quantity. When I came to the shanty, I spoke to the owner about the woman. He replied: "Oh, yes; Biddy comes from the camp to give my missus a hand at washing, for which I give her a good strong drop. It warms her up." Although a law was passed with the intention of preventing publicans or shanty-keepers giving or selling grog to the natives, it, like many others, proved a dead letter. For one conviction, hundreds escaped.

Many have said that the white man's rifle has contributed more than anything else to their extinction. This is quite untrue; for one slain by the rifle thousands have fallen by the bottle and its accompanying vices. As in all new countries, conflicts must sometimes occur between the aborigines and the intruding whites. But these have been attended by great loss of life less frequently in Australia than in any country of which I have ever read. The blacks never made a stand in numbers to resist the white intruders on their hunting-grounds; consequently only a desultory warfare existed, causing but few deaths on either side. The Queensland black police have got their share, and a hundred times more than their share, of abuse, chiefly from those who had no personal opportunity of forming any correct judgment of the circumstances. The blacks shot in these affrays have been multiplied ten and twenty fold. Such a report, losing nothing by passing through many mouths, is either doubled or trebled before being printed, and the would-be philanthropists turn up their eyes in horror after swallowing the untrue story with gusto. I do not for one moment attempt to assert that all the blacks shot by the police were guilty. It is often impossible to get at the actual culprit, but here necessity steps in, for it is proved beyond all doubt that a wild tribe must receive punishment for misconduct, even if the actual individual aggressor cannot be discovered. A salutary chastisement inflicted on a member of that tribe when they are hot-handed generally proves sufficient.

I know that isolated cases of unnecessary cruelty have taken place. It would be strange if such were not the case. Without the black police, northern Queensland would be uninhabitable by whites. With the exception of that part of Australia and also of north-west Australia, where many natives may still be seen, all other parts of this country are virtually clear of them. Their fishing and hunting localities know them no more for ever. I lately made an extended tour of many hundred miles along the banks of the Lachlan and Darling Rivers. On these, less than thirty years ago, natives swarmed by tens of thousands. All are now departed, gone to join their kindred in the happy hunting-grounds beyond the setting sun. In all those miles I met with just seven survivors—poor, miserable creatures, hanging about the public-houses.

I am aware that well-meaning men have succeeded in collecting at mission stations a remnant of a few of the dying thousands, endeavouring to Christianize them, and otherwise make their departure from this world less miserable. All honour to them for their philanthropic attempts. In spite of them, the last man, as in Tasmania, will soon have passed away.

Very little do the rising generation of whites know of the habits of the former possessors of the soil. I may here mention an instance that occurred to me some years ago. I was in the Royal Park, Melbourne, walking with my oldest friend, Mr. Le Sonef. Suddenly I started, for a turn in the path brought me to a blacks' encampment. The bark gunyas, the spears, and other weapons, the dilly-bags, etc., were all there, so like in every particular what I had been accustomed to see in former days, that I was completely deceived. "Where did the blacks come from?" I asked Mr. Le Sonef. He smiled as he answered: "Oh, I did that in order to show the rising generation what an encampment was like!"

The Australian aborigines are gone, or nearly so. The next generation, if not the present, will see the last of them. Circumstances alter cases. When the whites came among them, they had not passed the neolithic age. Untold centuries in the far past, when our own progenitors were in a similar age, had a civilization like the present been suddenly dropped among them from Mars or some other planet, what might then have been the result? If geologists are correct, cannibalism and other vices were not then unknown. What right, then, have we, who have been more fortunate, to cast stones at the Australian or any other savage nation, and compare our advanced views and fads with their rites and ceremonies, dress or no dress ? Our sharp, burnished implements, and our laws, ideas, and vices have been pitted against their rough, unpolished stone weapons and their innocent state of nature. What wonder that they perished in the uneven contest ! Peace be with them—they have less to answer for than we !

What their ideas regarding an after life were is uncertain. That they did not altogether cease to exist at death, they believed. The same vague something, we know not what, which permeates all sorts and conditions of men, teaching them that death is not the final end, was not absent from their minds. They displayed very many good traits ; let the evil be buried with them. It is not the rifle that has exterminated them, but clothing and the vices of the whites, even as they have done and are still doing in the South Sea Islands and in other lands.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE OLD ORDER AND THE NEW.

NO industry has been subject to so complete a revolution as that of the Australian squatter. From the early commencement of colonial enterprise until about the year 1860 the squatter reigned supreme over almost unlimited areas of country; his flocks and herds multiplied exceedingly, while he, independent—or generally so—of banks and loan companies, lived an easy and a happy life. The sale of his wool-clip produced money amply sufficient to cover all his liabilities, leaving a good residue to be deposited for a rainy day. He was hospitable to a fault, and was pleased to entertain respectable visitors at his comfortable homestead, deferring their departure as long as possible.

The great events in his life were the seasons of shearing and lambing. When these were over, he had time for enjoyment, either at home, or by taking his family, if he had one, a trip to the metropolis. I ought, however, to mention that the greatest event of all was the arrival of the drays containing the year's supplies for the station. The numerous articles these contained would astonish a squatter of the present day. The principal were flour, tea, sugar, tobacco, and salt. Then came a few luxuries for the use of himself or his family, and the thousand and one things requisite to replenish the station store—slops, or ready-made clothing, boots, shirts, pickles, and jams, not forgetting the at that time universal remedy, a large supply of Holloway's ointment and pills. Saucepans, camp ovens, quart and pint pots, axes, etc., came from the drays in heaps, and generally from some mysterious hiding-place—the centre of a cask of sugar, or the inside of a vinegar or molasses barrel—was brought to light a keg of spirits. This secrecy was necessary to prevent its discovery by the bullock-drivers. For them the temptation was too great to be resisted. The ruse seldom escaped those lynx-eyed gentry; they knew full well that spirits were hidden away somewhere in their load, and had they been contained in a keg open to their view, that keg would soon have been sampled by them. Secreted as I have said, however, the temptation was put out of sight for the time, and the insatiable longing either entirely passed off, or did so sufficiently long to bring them to a wayside pub., where their thirst found temporary relief.

The keg being unpacked all right, and the contents found intact, the squatter—perhaps the first time for several months, his previous keg having been long empty—would imbibe a mild nip, tot, wet, ball, or nobbler, these being the names given to a small glass of spirits in the Australian bush. He would then lock his store, and be happy. His rent, due to Government for the many thousand acres he leased, was in those times a mere bagatelle; it did not trouble him in the least. His wool-clip was sufficient to cover all his expenses and pay the wages due to the many hands engaged at their different occupations on the run, while a draft of fat stock sent to market placed ample funds at his bankers to meet all his simple domestic requirements.

Thus the years passed over his head. His family grew up around him; perhaps his wife and several of his children now slept in the secluded but well looked after little burying-ground he had selected near, generally within sight of his homestead. Not only they, but many of the station hands found their last resting-place within the fence around it. There, by the side of his wife, the squatter hoped to be laid in the not very distant future. Well for him if that time arrived before the great change, as yet unforeseen, though fast approaching, which was to come upon all things pastoral. Had a vision of all that was to take place been presented to him, his happiness would have fled, and he would have longed for the day when he too might sleep the sleep that knows no waking.

Like a little king he lived, monarch of all, as far as his eye could reach. No one intruded on his dominions, and it never entered his mind that the time would come when he or his descendants would lose all, and even their name would be forgotten. To his thinking the worst that could happen to him was a slight increase of rent when his lease lapsed, a further extension, and then all would proceed as of old. As it had been, so it would ever be. Alas, vain are the hopes of man ! How little does he see of what the years have in store ! Over thirty years have come and gone, and I have personally witnessed the changes that have taken place on many a squatting property during that time.

Let me re-visit one I had known in the halcyon days of yore. A railway took me to what was formerly the boundary of the run. Still, I had twenty miles to drive or ride until the well-known sugar-loaf hill was reached. At its foot stood the old, rambling homestead I knew formerly. For many miles I passed fence and gate where none used to block the track. All around the trees were dead and dying, the axe having cut deep into the bark of every one of them, leaving its mark in a ring encircling their trunks. Like gaunt spectres they stood, their dead, decaying limbs falling to the earth on every side, the parent stem soon to follow in the general destruction. I met a buggy ; the driver was opening one of the numerous gates. Without thinking, I inquired of him how far it was to C——'s homestead. He looked astonished at my request, remarking that I must be on the wrong road, as he never heard of C—— or his homestead, but that if I kept the road right on, after passing several farms, I should come to the Shearers' Arms public-house, where the landlord would give me the information I wanted. I looked at him, and seeing he was only a stripling of some twenty summers, I recollected that it was quite thirty-four years since I had travelled that road—years, therefore, before he was born. Thanking him, I went on.

On arriving at the brow of a hill overlooking the valley, I found that nothing but the creek running through it and the sugar-loaf hill had the slightest resemblance to anything I remembered. Rough log fences and tumble-down buildings dotted the valley in several places. These were the homes of free selectors, and very dirty and neglected they appeared.

After passing through several slip-rails, I made my way to the hill, but no homestead was there. I well remembered a large granite boulder that stood close to one end of the long verandah. There, unchanged, it still remained. I had often seen the hospitable hostess of the old home call her boys down from its summit, as one had previously broken his arm through a fall when sliding down its side. Close by, a charred but squared stump rose above the ground. This and a few stones, marking the situation of the large fire-place, were all that was left of that once happy home. The site of the old graveyard was nowhere to be distinguished, though I well knew within a few yards where it lay. A rough log fence now passed right through the centre of it.

Feeling melancholy and depressed, I mounted my horse, and made my way to the Shearers' Arms, a small public-house down by the creek. From the landlord I gathered all the information I could of the C—— family. The last of them, he told me, had cleared out for New Zealand more than twenty years ago, but further than that he did not know what had become of them. Free selectors came in droves, and selected the best parts of the run. The old squatter bore up for a time, as acre after acre departed from him, but at last it broke his heart. He died, and was buried by the side of his wife and many of his children in the little graveyard.

"But surely," said I, "the fence round it was kept in repair by some one?"

He appeared astonished at my question, and replied: "Who would take the trouble to do that? One day a bush fire burnt most of it, and a good job too, for it was partly on the ground of two selectors, and its destruction enabled them to run their dividing fence through the middle of it."

With a sigh, I could only hope that the sleepers lay sufficiently deep to prevent the selectors' ploughshare disturbing their rest, until all that was mortal had returned to dust.

As with this, so with many stations I have lately visited. Not only the last resting-place, but the very name of the pioneer squatter, has disappeared. A new generation, and an aggressive one, farm in slovenly fashion, and eke out a miserable existence. They erect their ramshackle homesteads with no regard to taste. In them are begotten swarms of half-wild children, who will not reply to a civil question if asked, but either stupidly stare, hide behind the first tree, or creep into some hole, as the traveller passes by. Into what they may develop is to me a mystery.

Squatting is really an occupation of the past. The influx of the selector and the march of democracy demand the land. More—much more—than they can turn to any good account is open to them, but their insatiable greed, like the horse-leech's daughter, still cries "Give! Give!" Latterly, the squatter, with rents grievous to be borne, struggled hard. He borrowed money to purchase portions of his squattage; he hoped against hope. The rent, and the interest on his borrowed money, crushed him. Day by day he saw the best portions of his run passed over to the selector; his heart was broken, and, hopelessly insolvent, he either died or fled from the home of his youth, a dispirited and melancholy man. Most of his class are like the blacks—extinct, or fast becoming so.

It is now the selector's turn. How long will it last? Only just so long as he in his turn is not swallowed, and crudely digested in the maw of the capitalist, who here, as in the old country, adds acre to acre, absorbing like a shark all the little fry around him, who must in time either become extinct or the tenants of a rapacious landlord.

But even the capitalist's sway, when it arrives, will be short. After him, I suppose, comes the deluge. A new order of men and ideas is advancing with rapid strides. But what may be the result to humanity lies hidden in the womb of time. "Men may come and men may go,—but the *earth* goes on for ever."

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